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AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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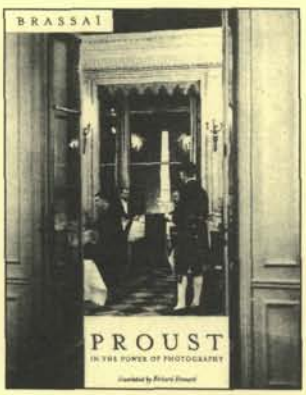

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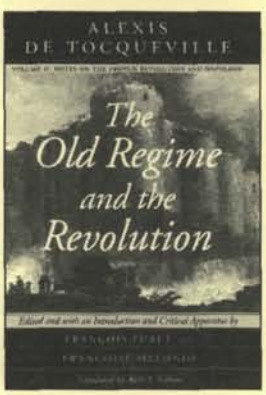

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Barnraising

Because I work at home in rural Massachusetts and the SCHOLAR's other staff and board members are scattered across a dozen states, I am often asked if my job is lonely. Not at all, I say; our innumerable e-mails and faxes and midnight phone calls have forged bonds that feel almost familial. Never have I felt this more strongly than on September 12, when we decided to scrap our Winter issue and assemble a new one. All day long, I'd no sooner hang up the phone than another colleague would call, offering an essay or suggesting a possible writer. Had I thought of Penelope Lively, who had been raised in Egypt and had written a novel about a hijacking? Could Ali Asani explain what the Qur'an says about violence? Could Jonathan Rosen explain what the Torah says about vengeance? Did I know that Andrea Barrett had recently moved to New York City and, from the roof of her apartment building, had seen the towers of the World Trade Center fall? It was a barnraising, and the exertion of hoisting the beams together rescued us from paralyzing despair.

One of the first people I talked to was Adam Goodheart, an editorial board member whose writing I've admired since he was in college. (I'd helped judge a *Harvard Magazine* Undergraduate Columnist competition, and could hardly believe that the author of the winning entry was only twenty years old—or that he had the same name as the lugubrious servant in *Ruddigore*.) When I became editor of the SCHOLAR, Adam pored over cover designs, conceived the "Commonplace Book" department, and spent hours shuffling index cards ("Books," "Reader Replies," "Shep Nuland's column") until we found the right structure for the magazine. That, too, was a barnraising. In our Autumn 2000 issue, we published "The Last Island of the Savages," Adam's remarkable essay on the Andaman Islands, in the Bay of Bengal. (Adam is the most peripatetic person I know. He once e-mailed me the itinerary for a summer of travel reportage: "June 4–21: Africa. June 29–July 7: France. July 20–30: Italy. August 10–18: Alaska, on a boat, unreachable. Late August: Siberia, woolly mammoth cave.")

For this issue, in addition to suggesting several potential contributors, Adam volunteered to write about the skyscraper and the airplane, two icons of modern design that have a surprising amount in common. "They're high up," he told me. "They cram a lot of people into a small space, they have windows that don't open, and hardly anyone understands how they stay up. That's why they scare us. On the morning of September 11, our fears collided." Adam's essay begins on page 13.

A. F.

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· CONTENTS ·

AT LARGE AND AT SMALL ..... *Philonoë* 5

COMMONPLACE BOOK ..... *collected by André Bernard* 10

9.11.01

The Skyscraper and the Airplane ..... *Adam Goodheart* 13
A Hole in the Wall ..... *Andrea Barrett* 20
Double Exposure ..... *D. Graham Burnett* and *Maria Burnett-Gaudiani* 29
In Morocco ..... *David Levering Lewis* 38
Primary Questions ..... *Isabel Fonseca* 41
Dancing to Distant Tunes ..... *Penelope Lively* 46
Affliction ..... *Carlo Rotella* 48
Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an ..... *Ali S. Asani* 52
Grace, Punishment, and the Torah ..... *Jonathan Rosen* 61
The Lesson of Antietam ..... *James M. McPherson* 64
The Global Century ..... *Shashi Tharoor* 66
Leap ..... *Brian Doyle* 69
After September (poem) ..... *Mary Jo Salter* 71

ARTICLES

Teacher: Eleven Notes ..... *Lionel Basney* 75
The Nomads of Language ..... *Ariel Dorfman* 89
Why Do We Still Read Homer? ..... *Andrew Szegedy-Maszak* 95
Mechanic ..... *John Lukacs* 107
Childfree in Toyland ..... *Christopher Clausen* 111
Obelisks and Empires of the Mind ..... *Anthony Grafton* 123

THE UNCERTAIN ART ..... *Sherwin B. Nuland* 129

JOURNAL ..... *Thomas A. Stewart* 133

BOOKS

REREADING: Whitman's Triumph ..... *Vijay Seshadri* 136
The Depths of Feeling ..... *Mark Kingwell* 142
REVIEWS ..... *David Gessner, Rachel Hadas, Andrey Slivka, Minna Proctor* 145

POETRY ..... *Nikia Leopold* 74; *Christopher Matthews* 106; *Richard Lehnert* 122

THE READER REPLIES 157

THE PODIUM ..... *Danielle S. Allen* 160

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AT LARGE
AND
AT SMALL

A Piece of Cotton

PHILONOË

When we bought an old brick farmhouse last summer in a small New England town, the elderly couple who had lived there for many years left us a set of plastic lawn chairs, a garbage can, a tool bench, a wheelbarrow, and an American flag. On September 13, with our children's help, we raised it to half staff. Our six-year-old son enjoyed pulling the halyard; on its way up the peeling white-painted pole, next to the big maple tree in the front yard, the flag made an interesting and satisfying sound, partway between a squeak and a ring. We'd read up on half-masting protocol, which dictates raising the flag briskly to the peak and then slowly bringing it halfway down. George said, "This flag is lowered now, but it will rise again, just as our country will." It is useful to have children around at such times: they authorize clichés that their parents deeply believe but might otherwise hesitate to voice.

Neither George nor I had ever owned a flag, not even a little one to wave on the Fourth of July. The closest George had come was the pair of stars-and-stripes bell-bottoms he had worn in the sixties (in violation of section 176d of the United States Flag Code: "The flag should never be used as wearing apparel, bedding, or drapery"). The closest I had come was the handkerchief-sized Whole Earth banner that I had affixed to the aerial of my brother's car before we drove from our home in California to college in Massachusetts in the fall of 1970. We took the whole earth idea seriously: what a provincial notion, I remember thinking, to fly a flag that implied one was a citizen of only *part* of the earth!

If you had asked me then what it meant to be a flag owner—or, as I would have called it, a flag-waver, as if holding a flag in one's hand was inherently more ridiculous than stringing it up a pole—I would have said "Vietnam." But my answer would have been false. My disdain for the flag wasn't really political. It was social. When I burrow back into my seventeen-year-old self as thoroughly as the intervening decades allow, here's what I fear she was thinking: If you were a flag-waver, you lived in a split-level house with vinyl siding in a suburb of Omaha. You had a crew cut. Your children belonged to the 4-H Club and had a dog that, without irony—there was no irony within a five-hundred-mile radius of Omaha—they had named Fido. You read *Reader's Digest* and listened to Andy Williams. You ate tuna casserole and frozen peas for dinner, followed by lime Jell-O with little pieces of banana suspended in it. You had never traveled east of Wichita (or maybe west; I had never been to either Omaha or Wichita, and knew only that they were both somewhere in the amorphous middle of things).

"Sept. 11 made it safe for liberals to be patriots," the critic George Packer wrote recently in *The New York Times*. Like me, Packer once considered flag-waving an embarrassing display of bad taste ("sentimental, primitive, sometimes aggressive"), though he associated it more with the working class than with the Cleaveresque middle class. Either way, it wasn't the sort of thing our families indulged in. When people like Packer and me were teenagers, we had little interest in the socioeconomic tiers that separated the upper middle class, to which we belonged, from what we might have called the "underprivileged class" (a group with which we professed heartfelt solidarity, whether or not we'd ever met any of its members). And in those days, in those circles (which pretended to be egalitarian but were in fact unthinkingly, unapologetically, unbeliev-

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ably snobbish), America was itself déclassé, a simpleminded concatenation of Uncle Sam and log cabins and Smokey the Bear. I mean, really: if you wanted a stimulating dinner companion, would you pick Betsy Ross or Jean-Paul Sartre?

In March of 1918, a year after the United States entered World War I, a mob surrounded a Montana man named E. V. Starr and tried to force him to kiss an American flag. Starr refused, saying, "What is this thing anyway? Nothing but a piece of cotton with a little paint on it and some other marks in the corner there. I will not kiss that thing. It might be covered with microbes."

The previous month, Montana had enacted a flag desecration statute that became the model for the 1918 federal Sedition Act, outlawing "disloyal, profane, scurrilous, or abusive language" about the United States government or its flag. Starr was charged with sedition, fined $500, and sent to the state penitentiary for ten to twenty years of hard labor. Ruling on Starr's appeal, the federal district court judge who heard the appeal wrote:

> In the matter of his offense and sentence, obviously petitioner was more sinned against that sinning. . . . [The mob's] unlawful and disorderly conduct, not his just resistance, nor the trivial and innocuous retort into which they goaded him, was calculated to degrade the sacred banner and to bring it into contempt. Its members, not he, should have been punished.

Although he called the court that had sentenced Starr "stark, staring, raving mad"—no penalty that severe had ever been meted out, or would ever be meted out again, in a United States flag desecration case—the judge ruled that the state law was nonetheless constitutional and that he had no other choice than to uphold the conviction.

The unfortunate Starr's only bit of luck was that the Montana mob did not assault him, unlike the automobile workers in Lansing, Michigan, who, the same winter, after a fellow employee wiped his hands on a flag, had chopped a hole in the ice that covered the Grand River, tied a clothesline to the man's foot, and submerged him until he apologized; or the saloon patrons in Thermopolis, Wyoming, who, the previous year, had lynched a man for shouting "Hoch lebe der Kaiser." (In the latter case the victim was cut down in the nick of time by the city marshal. *The Chicago Tribune* reported: "Revived with cold water, he was forced to kneel and kiss the American flag. He then was warned to get out of town. He did.")

I read about these cases—they are collected in a fascinating and disturbing book called *Desecrating the American Flag: Key Documents of the Controversy from the Civil War to 1995*, edited by Robert Justin Goldstein—while I was attending a conference in Colonial Williamsburg, the omphalos of Americana. It felt strange to underline E. V. Starr's question in a hotel room crammed with hooked rugs and embroidered samplers. What *is* this thing, anyway? I thought. Is it just a piece of cotton? Is it, as Katha Pollitt put it, explaining why she had refused her daughter's request to hang a flag in their window, a symbol of "jingoism and vengeance and war"? Or is it, as a group of New York women wrote in the dedication of a silk flag they had sewn for Union soldiers in 1861, "the emblem of all you have sworn to defend: / Of freedom and progress, with order combined, / The cause of the *Nation*, of *God*, and *Mankind*"?

After September 11, I saw for the first time that the flag—along with all its red, white, and blue collateral relations—is what a semiotician would call "polysemous": it has multiple meanings. The flag held aloft by the pair of dishevelled hitchhikers who squatted next to their backpacks on Route 116, a mile from our home, meant *We will not rape or murder you.* The red, white, and blue turban worn by the Sikh umbrella vendor a friend walked past in Dupont Circle, not far from the White House, meant *Looking like someone and thinking like him are not the same thing.* The flag on the lapel of a Massachusetts attorney mentioned in our local paper—on seeing it, his opposing counsel had whispered to a colleague, "I'm so screwed, do you have a flag pin I can borrow?"—meant *I am morally superior.* The flags brandished by two cowboy-hatted singers at a country fair we attended on the day the first bombs fell on Afghanistan meant *Let's kill the bastards.* The Old

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Glory bandanna around the neck of the well-groomed golden retriever I saw on a trip to Manhattan meant *Even if I have a Prada bag and my dog has a pedigree, I'm still a New Yorker and I have lost something.* The flag in our front yard meant *We are sad. And we're sorry we've never done this before.*

Newspapers printed full-page color flags for flagless readers to tape on their windows. NBC put stars and stripes on its peacock. The Macdougal Street Tattoo Company in Greenwich Village gave pro bono patriotic tattoos—something new under the sun—to nearly five hundred World Trade Center rescue workers. A Pennsylvania man had a flag shaved into his buzz cut. A New York restaurant called The Tonic introduced a dessert called Stars and Stripes: white mascarpone panna cotta encircled by red and blue pomegranate- and grape-flavored stars. The design of a new 34-cent flag stamp, captioned UNITED WE STAND, was rushed through several layers of U.S. Postal Service red tape in record time so that a billion stamps could be available by November 1. The space shuttle *Endeavor* carried more than six thousand flags to the International Space Station and brought them back for distribution to the families of those killed on September 11. Our son made a flag from a leaf and a twig to mark the final days of his vegetable garden, and asked if he should fly it at half staff.

When I visited my mother in Florida, I paused at the window of the gift shop in the Fort Myers airport. Outside, a National Guardsman with an M-16 patrolled the corridor. Inside, on a bed of gold-flecked gauze, reposed the largest collection of red, white, and blue objects I had ever seen: flags, streamers, key chains, pens, fans, T-shirts, baseball caps, figurines, coffee mugs, beer steins, shot glasses, menorahs, postcards with photographs of flags surrounded by oranges and flamingos, bumper stickers that said THESE COLORS NEVER RUN, starfish emblazoned with the words GOD BLESS AMERICA. The meaning of these objects had nothing to do with either Washington or Afghanistan; the flag was a "theme," like the "Underwater Theme" we'd chosen for our high school senior prom. ("Japan?" "Too hard to draw all those geishas." "Outer Space?" "Too much black and white." "Underwater?" "Now there's an idea.") I had recently seen a coffee-table book of flag-oriented antiques, each beautifully photographed and embellished with little airbrushed shadows, arranged on the pages like jewels in a Tiffany vitrine. *Patriotic Shield Pin Box. Uncle Sam Hat Brooch. Brass and Enamel Belt Buckle. Admiral Perry Whiskey Flask. Wheatlet Trading Card.* They all looked incredibly expensive, but what they had gained in value over the years they had lost in meaning: they were no longer about patriotism in wartime, they were about being collectible. The Fort Myers gift shop window was indistinguishable from a page in that book. It was already meaningless. All it needed was a caption: "Americana—Assorted Ephemera & Folk Art, 2001."

But just because most of the flag paraphernalia was dreck didn't mean that all of it was. I was caught short by the reproduction of Edward P. Moran's flag-filled 1886 painting *Statue of Liberty Enlightening the World,* placed in *The New York Times* by the Museum of the City of New York, accompanied by a quotation from Le Corbusier: "New York is not a completed city. . . . It is a city in the process of becoming. Today it belongs to the world. Without anyone expecting it, it has became the jewel in the crown of universal cities. . . . New York is a great diamond, hard and dry, sparkling, triumphant!" Just typing those words, nearly three months later, brings on the peculiar feeling of congestion I still feel every morning when I read the *Times* obituaries and start thinking about the widow who gave birth to twins on September 15 or the woman who lost both a husband and a son. I had lived in New York for twenty-five years, twenty-two of them within walking distance of the World Trade Center. The trauma center nearest the site was the hospital where our daughter was born; Engine 24/Ladder 5, where Mayor Giuliani, covered in ash, set up his temporary command post, was our corner firehouse. I felt ashamed when I caught myself thinking of this as a neighborhood tragedy rather than a global one; it was the solipsistic fallacy of believing that the telephone pole you're closest to is taller than all the rest, just because it *looks* taller. Our Massachusetts friends said to us, "You must be so

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relieved to have moved!" And though we did feel relief, our feelings were complicated and contradictory. We loved New York all the more because of what had been done to it. George said it was like the upwelling of tenderness one might feel upon hearing that an old lover had been grievously injured. I knew, though it seemed like a dishonorably trivial emotion, that one of the reasons Moran and Le Corbusier affected me was homesickness.

It was good to see George watching the World Series one night. Until then, we had been unable to watch any television that did not deal with September 11. Flying above center field at Yankee Stadium was a torn flag. It was shaped like an oriflamme, the banner the king's army carried in twelfth-century France, split at one end with flying edges like two flames. The flag, which had flown somewhere inside the World Trade Center, had been found in the rubble and nearly disposed of (Flag Code section 176k: "The flag, when it is in such condition that it is no longer a fitting emblem for display, should be destroyed in a dignified way, preferably by burning"). The Port Authority intervened, and Sgt. Antonio Scannella, a police officer who had lost thirteen of his squad's eighteen members, became the flag's unofficial caretaker, saying, "You can't throw an American flag in the garbage." When Max Von Essen, the son of the New York City Fire Commissioner, sang "The Star-Spangled Banner" (the only national anthem I can think of that's specifically about a flag), my throat caught in an unfamiliar way.

Why did the lopsided flag that billowed across our television screen pull strings that had previously been unpullable? I think it moved me *because* it was damaged, like the city itself. A clean rectangle whose proportions conform precisely to the Executive Order issued in 1912 by President Taft—hoist (height) 1.0, fly (length) 1.9, hoist of union (blue field) .5385, fly of union .76, width of each stripe .0769, diameter of each star .0616—calls up less passionate associations than, for instance, the flag flown by the Sixteenth Regiment of Connecticut volunteers in the Civil War. When surrender was inevitable, the soldiers tore the flag into fragments to keep it from falling into enemy hands. A historian named F. C. Hicks wrote in 1926:

> The regiment, some five hundred strong, was sent to a prison camp where most of the men remained until the close of the war. Each piece of the colors was sacredly preserved. When a soldier died his piece was entrusted to a comrade. At the end of the war the weary prisoners returned to their homes, each bringing his bit of star or stripe with him. All these torn fragments were patched together and the regimental colors, nearly complete, are now preserved in the State House at Hartford.

To read about our nation's vexillological history—"vexillology," the study of flags, is an excellent crossword-puzzle word that derives from the Latin *vexillum*, or banner—is to experience a series of bitter disillusionments. Betsy Ross did not design the stars and stripes; she sewed flags for the navy in the spring of 1777, but there is no evidence that the flag as we know it was conceived before June 14 of that year, when the Continental Congress, which had previously been more concerned about designing a national seal, finally got around to the flag: "RESOLVED: that the flag of the United States be made of thirteen stripes, alternate red and white; that the union be thirteen stars, white in a blue field, representing a new constellation." (Many historians now attribute the circular shape of that constellation to Francis Hopkinson, a delegate from New Jersey, though late-eighteenth-century flags show the stars disposed in a variety of arrangements, including a single vertical line and an X.) George Washington did not cross the Delaware with flag in hand; the Battle of Trenton was fought six months before the Flag Resolution. The flag's design did not immediately engrave itself on the memories of all who beheld it; in 1778, Benjamin Franklin and John Adams informed the King of the Two Sicilies that the stripes were "alternately red, white, and blue," and on a ceramic jug manufactured in Liverpool at about the same time, an American ship flew a flag with blue and yellow stripes. "The Star-Spangled Banner" did not immediately become the national anthem; though it was written by Francis Scott Key during the Battle of Fort McHenry in 1814 (and set to the tune of "To Anacreon in Heaven," a British drinking song celebrating a bibulous

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Greek poet who is said to have choked to death on a grape), it was not officially adopted until 1931.

In fact, as Scot M. Guenter explains in *The American Flag, 1777–1924: Cultural Shifts from Creation to Codification*, it was not until Rebel forces fired on the flag at Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, that the flag, which earlier had been used mainly for identifying naval and commercial vessels, was transformed into a symbol men were willing to die for. If it took the Civil War to sacralize the flag—as the historian George Henry Preble wrote in 1880, "its prose became poetry"—it took the commercialism of the ensuing decades to turn its poetry back into prose. In 1905, an anti-desecration circular lamented the use of the flag in advertisements for "bicycles, bock beer, whiskey, fine cambric, bone knoll, sour mash, tar soap, American pepsin chewing gum, theatres, tobacco, Japan tea, awnings, breweries, cigars, charity balls, cuff buttons, dime museums, floor mats, fireworks, furriers, living pictures, picnic grounds, patent medicines, poolrooms, prize fights, restaurants, roof gardens, real estate agencies, sample rooms, shoe stores, soap makers, saloons, shooting galleries, tent makers, variety shows, [and] vendors of lemon acid." Tame stuff, perhaps, compared with David Bowie, his face painted red, white, and blue and a miniature vodka bottle resting on his naked clavicle (caption: "Absolut Bowie"), or with the nightmarish ads that clog the Internet ("Render this Osama Voo-Doo doll completely Pin-Laden! 6-inch doll for a Stocking Stuffer Price of $9.99! Comes with 6 red, white, and blue extra-sharp Patriot Pins").

In 1989, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago mounted an exhibit called "What Is the Proper Way to Display the American Flag?" In order to reach the leather-bound ledger in which they were asked to record their responses, viewers had to walk on a flag laid on the floor. "For days," reported *The Detroit News*, "veterans picked the flag up off the floor, folded it in the ceremonial military fashion and placed it on the shelf. Their faces were almost always stoic; one was visibly in tears at the sight of grimy footprints on the flag. Moments later, however, the flag was unfolded by supporters of the art, usually students with indignant faces, who shook out the flag like a bedsheet, and then draped it on the floor."

The same year, in a controversial case called *Texas v. Johnson*, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy explained why he had concluded, with great reluctance, that flag-burning is a form of free speech and therefore protected by the First Amendment. "Though symbols often are what we ourselves make of them," he wrote, "the flag is constant in expressing beliefs Americans share, beliefs in law and peace and that freedom which sustains the human spirit. The case here today forces recognition of the costs to which those beliefs commit us. It is poignant but fundamental that the flag protects those who hold it in contempt."

We kept our flag at half staff longer than President Bush decreed that we should, and then, after raising it to full staff, we continued to fly it after most of our neighbors had put theirs away. Maybe we were making up for lost time. Maybe we needed to see our flag flying in order to convince ourselves that even though protesters marching near a mosque in Bridgewater, Illinois, had waved flags and chanted "U.S.A.! U.S.A.!," we could choose another meaning in Whately, Massachusetts: the one a Chicago flag committee had in mind in 1895 when it called the stars and stripes "our greater self."

I had not looked closely at our flag when we raised it, so I decided to take it down one day to see whether it was made of cotton or silk. It was a raw afternoon in early December; freezing rain was falling on gray patches of snow. Section 174c of the Flag Code prohibits display in inclement weather, but a handful of local diehards were still flying their flags rain or shine, twenty-four hours a day, so we had followed suit. The flag was sodden and looked like a shrouded bat. When I lowered it and detached the grommets from the halyard, I could see that it was made of nylon. Black letters printed on the hoist, so faded I could barely make them out, read DURA LITE. The red stitching that connected the stripes was beginning to bleed. The embroidered white stars were fraying. As I refastened the brass clip, I tried hard to keep the old, wet, shabby flag from touching the ground.

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True courage is to do without witnesses everything that one is capable of doing before all the world.

—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD,
Maximes, *No. 216, 1665*

But the hour, the day, the night pass'd, and whatever returns, an hour, a day, a night like that can never return. The President, recovering himself, begins that very night—sternly, rapidly sets about the task of organizing his forces, and placing himself in positions for further and surer work. If there were nothing else of Abraham Lincoln for history to stamp him with, it is enough to send him with his wreath to the memory of all future time, that he endured that hour, that day, bitterer than gall . . . that it did not conquer him—that he unflinchingly stemm'd it, and resolved to lift himself and the Union out of it.

—WALT WHITMAN,
on the day after the Battle of Bull Run, in Specimen Days and Collect, *1882*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Courage

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

We throw our city open to all the world and we never by exclusion [sic] acts debar anyone from learning or seeing anything which an enemy might profit by observing if it were not kept from his sight; for we place our dependence, not so much on prearranged devices to deceive, as upon the courage which springs from our own souls when we are called to action.

—THUCYDIDES,
History of the Peloponnesian War, *(c. 400 B.C.)*

It is plain that there is no separate essence called courage, no cup or cell in the brain, no vessel in the heart containing drops or atoms that make or give this virtue; but it is the right or healthy state of every man, when he is free to do that which is constitutional to him to do. It is directness,—the instant performing of that which he ought.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON,
Society and Solitude, *1870*

And now it has come to us to stand alone in the breach, and face the worst that the tyrant's might and enmity can do. Bearing ourselves humbly before God, but conscious that we serve an unfolding purpose, we are ready to defend our native land against the invasion by which it is threatened. We are fighting *by* ourselves alone; but we are not fighting *for* ourselves alone. . . . We await undismayed the impending assault. Perhaps it will come tonight. Perhaps it will come next week. Perhaps it will never come. We must show ourselves equally capable of meeting a sudden violent shock or—what is perhaps a harder test—a prolonged vigil. But be the ordeal short or long, or both, we shall seek no terms, we shall tolerate no parley; we may show mercy—we shall ask for none.

—WINSTON CHURCHILL,
"The War of the Unknown Warrior," *radio broadcast, July 14, 1940*

I pray you, Master Lieutenant, see me safe up, and for my coming down, let me shift for myself.

—THOMAS MORE,
ascending the scaffold for his own execution, to the Lieutenant of the Tower of London, July 7, 1535

As I entered the White House car, I noticed Tony Vaccaro, Capitol Hill correspondent for the Associated Press, as he stood on the curb. I told him to hop in, and the three of us drove to the White House together. In our conversation I remember saying that few men in history equaled the one into whose shoes I was stepping and that I silently prayed to God that I could measure up to the task.

—HARRY S. TRUMAN,
on his first day as President (April 12, 1945), in Memoirs, Vol. I: Year of Decisions, *1955*

Who, then, is the invincible man? He whom nothing that is outside the sphere of his moral purpose can dismay.

—EPICTETUS,
Discourses, *Book One, ch. 18 (c. 101 A.D.)*

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We have been together for many years. Where you go, I go.

—MRS. ISIDOR STRAUS,
declining to leave the sinking Titanic,
to her husband, April 14, 1912

The personal bond between leader and follower is at the root of all explanations of what does and does not happen in battle: and that bond is always strongest in martial societies, of which fifteenth-century England is one type and the warrior states of India, which the British harnessed so successfully to their imperial purpose, are another. The matter of the bond is more complex, and certainly more materialistic than modern ethnologists would like to have us believe. But its importance must not be underestimated. And though the late-medieval soldier's immediate loyalty lay towards his captain, the presence on the field of his own and his captain's anointed king, visible to all and ostentatiously risking his life in the heart of the melee, must have greatly strengthened his resolve.

—JOHN KEEGAN,
The Face of Battle, *1976*

Then the king leapt on a hobby, with a white rod in his hand, one of his marshals on the one hand and the other on the other hand: he rode from rank to rank desiring every man to take heed that day to his right and honor. He spake it so sweetly and with such good countenance and merry cheer, that all such as were discomfited took courage in the seeing and hearing of him. . . . Then he caused every man to eat and drink a little, and so they did at their leisure. And afterward they ordered again their battles; then every man lay down on the earth and by his salet [sic] and bow, to be the more fresher when their enemies should come.

—JOHN FROISSART,
Chronicles, *on the morning of the Battle of Crécy, August 26, 1346*

If I tremble with cold, my enemies will say it was from fear: I will not expose myself to such reproaches.

—CHARLES I,
putting on two shirts on the wintry morning of his execution, January 30, 1649

Sir, I will not allow this man to have merit. . . . I will, indeed, allow him courage, and on this account we so far give him credit. We have more respect for a man who robs boldly on the highway, than for a fellow who jumps out of a ditch, and knocks you down behind your back. Courage is a quality so necessary for maintaining virtue, that it is always respected, even when it is associated with vice.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON,
on a certain clergyman; quoted in Boswell's Life of Dr. Johnson, *1784*

Seconds before 11:15 we were occupying three seats at the previously segregated Woolworth's lunch counter. In the beginning the waitresses seemed to ignore us, as if they really didn't know what was going on. Our waitress walked past us a couple of times before she noticed we had started to write our own orders down and realized we wanted service. We began to read to her from our order slips. She told us that we would be served at the back counter, which was for Negroes.

"We would like to be served here," I said.

—ANNE MOODY,
Coming of Age in Mississippi, *1968*

There have been joys too great to be described in words, and there have been griefs upon which I have not dared to dwell, and with these in mind I say, climb if you will, but remember that courage and strength are naught without prudence, and that a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime. Do nothing in haste, look well to each step, and from the beginning think what may be the end.

—EDWARD WHYMPER,
Scrambles Amongst the Alps, *1871*

It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart.

—ANNE FRANK,
The Diary of a Young Girl, *1947*

We're going to try and do something.

—TODD BEAMER,
to his wife by cell phone, United Airlines flight 93, September 11, 2001

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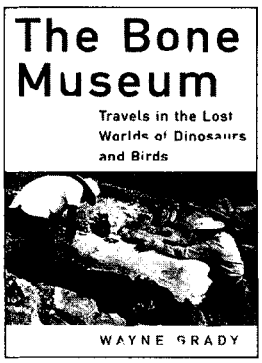
ADVENTURE



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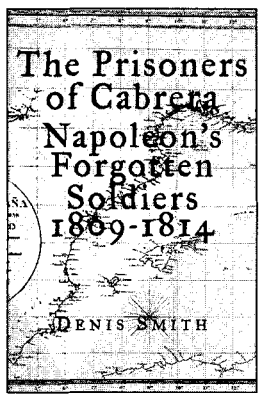

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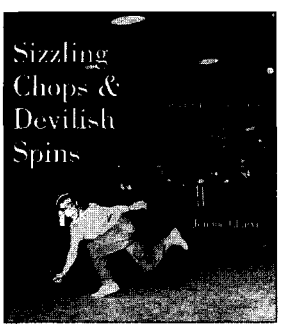

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9.11.01

The Skyscraper and the Airplane

ADAM GOODHEART

And as the smart ship grew
In stature, grace, and hue,
In shadowy silent distance grew the Iceberg too.
— Thomas Hardy,
"The Convergence of the Twain" (1912)

Before the fire, before the ash, before the bodies tumbling solitary through space, one thin skin of metal and glass met another. Miles apart only moments before, then feet, and then, in an almost inconceivable instant, only a fraction of an inch. Try to imagine them there, suspended: two man-made behemoths joined in a fatal kiss.

Fatal, fated: perhaps even long foreseen. The skyscraper and the airplane were born side by side, and ever since then have occupied adjacent rooms in our collective unconscious. To call September 11th a nightmare is to be clinically precise about it, for like all true nightmares, it was grafted together out of preexisting elements, fragments of our waking lives and our imaginations.

Nearly a century ago, just five years after the first scrawny aircraft left the ground at Kitty Hawk, a widely circulated illustration by a Manhattan publisher named Moses King—"King's Dream of New York," he titled it—

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showed a fantasy cityscape in which biplanes buzzed among the downtown office towers and a vast dirigible brushed the uppermost cupola. In that same year, 1908, E. M. Forster wrote a short story envisioning a world of the future where humans lived in huge structures composed of tiny, airless chambers, each one "like the cell of a bee," leaving them to travel in airships that crisscrossed the globe (though the earth had become so drably uniform, he observed, that "what was the good of going to Pekin when it was just like Shrewsbury?"). In the last paragraph of the story, "The Machine Stops," Forster imagined this world coming to an end: "The whole city was broken like a honeycomb. An air-ship . . . crashed downwards, exploding as it went, rending gallery after gallery with its wings of steel."

Skyscraper and airplane: fragile containers for even-more-fragile flesh and blood. Each an artificial shell of our own manufacture—or not quite of our own manufacture, since, strictly speaking, very few of us, as individuals, have any direct involvement in their creation. Each a capsule of recycled air, with windows sealed shut against the blue. Each an innovation that, in Forsterian terms, has made Pekin more and more like Shrewsbury. Each a honeycomb that traps us side by side with strangers. Each a rig that suspends us far above the ground, half-willing aerialists, and then whispers: *Trust me.* Each a machine that teaches us, in similar ways, how to be modern.

What keeps it up? What, that is to say, keeps *us* up? Perhaps one person in a thousand really knows, understanding coolly why it is that the contraption doesn't plummet back to earth under our weight. For the rest of us, the precise functioning of wing and girder, the mathematical intricacies of gravitational thrust and counterthrust, remain lifelong mysteries. Our animal selves, quite sensibly, would rather stick close to solid ground. But this is where we must steel ourselves to be something more than animals. We must summon up the will to trust—not so much in the metal armature beneath us as in the faceless experts who designed and built it, in the corporations that own and maintain it, in the armature of civilization and science. No wonder we sometimes get dizzy.

The cultural critic Marshall Berman, in selecting a title for his 1982 treatise on the experience of modernity, borrowed a newly resonant phrase from Karl Marx: *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air.* "To be modern," he wrote, "is to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world—and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are." It is to ride atop a skyscraper, to soar in an airplane. And both threatened us with such destruction, not just on that machine-bright morning in September, but long before.

Both sprang from the late nineteenth century, and from the American

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Middle West (Louis Sullivan's Chicago, the Wright Brothers' Ohio)—a place where earth and sky were blank canvases waiting to be filled with movement and form. Yet both had deeper roots as well. In England in the 1780s, the decade in which the Montgolfiers took to the air in their balloons, and the young Wordsworth and Coleridge sharpened their pens at grammar school, the Duke of Bedford owned an exceptionally large racehorse that one of his grooms named Skyscraper—the first recorded appearance of the word. (The mare finished first at the Epsom Derby in 1789.) In the years that followed, *skyscraper* was used to describe the uppermost sail on a ship's rigging (1794), a high hat or bonnet (1800), or simply a very tall person (1857). After crossing the Atlantic, it was used by American sportswriters as early as the 1860s to describe a towering fly ball. Like so many of the next century's most important words (*computer, rocket, network*), *skyscraper* jostled around indecisively for a while, hesitating between one meaning and another before settling into its ultimate niche. However they used the word, people were clearly grasping toward the sky, toward something up there that they could almost brush with their fingertips—and that they were determined to reach by one contrivance or another.

When the earliest buildings to be called skyscrapers appeared, in the 1870s and 1880s, they sprang into shape so suddenly as to seem born in a single piece. The pioneering architects of Chicago, one recent historian has written, "learned almost everything of importance that would be known a century later about how to build skyscrapers." Yet the skyscraper was not, as it seems to us now, a single unified invention, but rather many inventions knit into one.

First and foremost, of course, was the ability to produce cheap, high-quality structural steel—the first truly revolutionary architectural innovation since the Romans invented the arch and the dome two millennia before. One nineteenth-century engineer couched this development in almost Darwinian terms: For the first time, he explained, tall buildings were designed as vertebrates instead of crustaceans. For the first time, their loads and stresses could be carried not by massive carapaces of masonry but by a web of slender struts and braces whose strength lay in its interconnectedness: a prototypical modern form, destined to be replicated in everything from computer chips to international airline routes. Louis Sullivan might have boasted of his buildings' pure functionalism, but in fact the skyscraper's exterior was merely its skin, its only function (besides shelter from the elements) to provide a kind of movie screen onto which the architect could project any embellishment he chose: rich Gothic traceries, Art Deco's silvery sheen, or, eventually, the stern theatrics of high modernism.

Still, if architects had had only steel to work with, the interiors of their skyscrapers would have just been little more than dark and dreary war-

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rens. Office towers of ten and twenty stories required, for their basic functioning, a whole list of innovations that are now taken for granted, but that were still brand new in the second half of the nineteenth century: electric lights and central heating, passenger elevators and fire escapes, telephones and flush toilets. As fate had it, all of these appeared on the American scene at approximately the same time. And all of them, moreover, required a wholly new type of city to support them: one with reliable, centrally managed electric and gas companies, sewer systems, water mains, fire departments, elevator inspectors, telephone operators, trash collectors. Did the modern city give birth to the skyscraper, or vice versa? The answer, probably, is a bit of both.

Of all these varied accoutrements, none was more critical to the skyscraper's development than the passenger elevator. At New York's Crystal Palace exposition in 1854, a Yonkers mechanic named Elisha Graves Otis would periodically ascend high above the crowds on an open platform of wrought iron. As the machine creaked up to its zenith, the inventor gestured to an assistant, who cut through the hoisting rope with a hatchet. The spectators gasped in horror—but instead of plummeting to the ground, the elevator merely settled back into its ratcheted safety lock. "All safe, gentlemen, all safe," Otis announced.

Otis's words would become the constant refrain of the dawning era. In the nineteenth century, for the first time in human history, millions of ordinary people would be required to entrust their lives, on a daily basis, to technologies whose inner workings remained a mystery. They were a generation of pioneers, the men and women of New York and Chicago, no less than the settlers of the Great Plains. The odd thing, in retrospect, is how easily they seem to have taken the changes in stride. When the architect Bradford Gilbert, in 1888, topped off his Tower Building at eleven stories, many New York pedestrians avoided that block of Broadway, certain that the structure would topple in the first stiff breeze. But Gilbert, in an Otis-like show of confidence, moved his own office onto the uppermost floor; the building withstood a hurricane soon after, and before long was taken for granted. Barely two decades later, when the Metropolitan Life Building reached a record fifty stories, the only question was who would try for sixty. (It would be the retailing magnate Frank Woolworth, who began planning his skyscraper a few weeks after the Metropolitan tower opened.)

Even more remarkable, the mythology of the skyscraper was born full-fledged with the building itself. Here is the earliest recorded appearance of the word in its contemporary sense, from an 1883 issue of *American Architect and Building News:* "This form of sky-scraper gives that peculiar refined, independent, self-contained, daring, bold, heaven-reaching, erratic, piratic, Quixotic, American thought." (Those were the days when even trade journals waxed Whitmanesque.)

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A century earlier, Thomas Jefferson, proclaiming American exceptionalism in his *Notes on Virginia,* cited the extraordinary size of native bears and elk, caverns and waterfalls. (He even vigorously defended American Indians against a French naturalist's insinuation that their "organs of generation" were smaller than average.) But the skyscraper rendered all of Jefferson's examples irrelevant. Here was the final proof of America's towering stature, in a tower raised not by God but by its citizens.

Before long, the race to scrape the sky lifted off the ground. And like the skyscraper's, the airplane's infancy was shortlived, its full maturity quick to arrive: Orville Wright would live to see the era of inflight movies. Strut and brace, spar and rib formed the bones of the plane as they did of the skyscraper, stiffening an outer shell designed to cut through hostile wind. And the airplane, too, would become a sort of capsule of human amenities, but to an even greater degree: a mobile life-support system, no less than a spaceship would be.

And yet, after nearly a century aloft, we have never learned to occupy planes as comfortably as we do skyscrapers. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, in the 1930s, predicted that within a generation or two, the airplane would come to seem a perfectly commonplace thing, "an object as natural as a pebble polished by the waves." Instead, it still seems the very epitome of what is artificial and mechanical. Stepping aboard one, even the most habitual of flyers must exercise a small act of conscious will. The passenger never forgets that he is wagering his life on the journey, even if he knows that the odds in this type of roulette are relatively good.

Air travel is a unique experience in modern life, the sociologist Mark Gottdiener recently wrote, "because, deep down inside us, it is a 'near death' experience. It is the most common way individuals surrender control and voluntarily place themselves in harm's way in contemporary society. If they drive, they are also at risk, but they remain in control behind the wheel." Strapped into our seats, waiting on the runway, staring out the window at the stained frailty of the wing, we toy with fantasies of annihilation. We look at our fellow travelers and wonder what it would be like to face death alongside these strangers. A terribly intimate, terribly modern way to go: so close to one another in these well-lit rows, so far from family and home.

In a seminar for phobic flyers offered by American Airlines, participants spend ten consecutive hours being lectured by pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, and psychologists, who repeat this phrase like a mantra: "Airplanes do not drop, dive, plummet, or fall." In doing so, they merely voice the silent chant of every airborne congregation. For flying requires an act of almost religious faith, the surrender of oneself, in absolute trust, to the wisdom and benevolent expertise of corporations, pilots, governments, engineers—the whole apparatus of modernity. In

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this setting, the smallest acts take on ritual significance: the pantomimed instructions of flight attendants, the dimming of lights, the serving of food. Airline meals, tiny and perfectly formed, are like the Japanese tea ceremony, in which gesture is more important than nourishment. In giving us food, the airline offers us a promise of sustenance; in eating, we accept. All of us know one or two stiff-necked dissenters who refuse to fly at all, and they irritate us more than their mild neurosis would warrant, as if they had renounced their citizenship in the commonwealth of flight.

If the skyscraper, with its crudely phallic thrust, is male, the airplane is female. Entering, we pass into a place that promises—if rarely quite delivering—all the amenities of the womb: shelter, nourishment, warmth, dimness, sleep. The earliest flight attendants, in the 1920s, were men, but airlines quickly discovered that passengers preferred to be cared for by women, and before long they were openly competing with one another to provide the most beautiful and provocatively clad stewardesses. Erotic currents move among the passengers as well. Skyscrapers place us alongside strangers and demand that we work; airplanes seat us side by side and whisper idle fantasies of sex. This is the double face of modern alienation: the limitless pain of loneliness, the limitless promise of random encounters. Proximity, anonymity: the world of skyscrapers and airplanes is one in which terrorists stalk freely among their prey.

The architect of the World Trade Center, Minoru Yamasaki, was afraid of heights. He once wrote that in a world of perfect freedom, he'd have created nothing but one-story buildings overlooking fields of flowers. He designed the Trade Center with narrow windows framed by vertical columns like prison bars, close enough together that he could steady himself against them when looking out. Instead of one-story buildings overlooking fields of flowers, he built gargantuan monoliths overlooking a windswept plaza. Their scale was brutal, unsoftened by the slightest hint of stylishness. Only at a great distance did they impress, jutting like a double bowsprit from the prow of Manhattan, from the prow of America itself. Or, if you preferred, like a pair of middle fingers, raised against the hostile vastness of the Atlantic Ocean.

But to take in this view you had to stand far away: in Hoboken, or Hamburg, or Kabul. (Or to observe the towers through a lens. Like so many twentieth-century creations, they seemed designed to be seen not in person but on film, as though the cinematic eye were the only one that mattered.) Standing at the base of the towers and looking up, the human observer had the sense mostly not of their height, but of their immense weight. They were two mountains of trapped kinetic energy, perpetually poised at the brink of release. The irony of architecture, all architecture, is that we create structures to shelter ourselves, yet in building them, we set ourselves at risk. The surest way to stay safe from fires, earthquakes,

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and bombs is never to go indoors. The surest way not to fall is to stay on the ground.

In *Anna Karenina*, Levin is terrified by the birth of his first child, for he realizes that he has brought into the world a new means for him to be hurt beyond all previous imagining. Tolstoy recognized that every act of creation has its shadow double, a coequal act of destruction. When Yamasaki created buildings on an unprecedented scale, he also created the potential for disaster on an unprecedented scale, a nightmare knit into every cubic inch of glass and steel. (The man who would eventually engineer their destruction understood this: he came from a family of builders.) They fascinated us, as airplanes do, because part of us always imagined them falling. It is the same part of us that loves our children because we can imagine them dying.

And when the towers did fall, we watched with the horror of witnesses to a death half foreseen, in dreams and shadowy portents. They buckled, released their long-held burden, and wearily sank to earth.

The authors of the catastrophe—who can doubt it?—created something terrible and permanent: an image that will stand for as long as any tower. In a thousand years, anyone who knows anything at all about us, the ancient Modern Americans, will probably know about the skyscraper and the airplane, and about the bright September morning that welded them together.

Eight days after the collapse, I stood on lower Broadway near where the skyscrapers had been. The destruction was all strangely contained behind chain-link fences and squads of stolid cops: all the familiar markers of a Situation Under Control. The mounded ruins poured out a thick column of white smoke, its innards glowing sickly yellow under the slanting rays of late-afternoon sun. It looked exactly as if the crater of a volcano had somehow opened up among the downtown office buildings, and now was being probed and monitored by businesslike teams of geologists and seismologists, lest it erupt again without warning. I was reminded of being atop Mount Etna, and peering alongside other tourists into the gassy abyss of the caldera, looking fruitlessly for some deep-buried source of smoke and heat. Above everything, above the place where the towers had stood, a helicopter whirred, miraculously suspended, riding on a column of newly liberated air.

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A Hole in the Wall

ANDREA BARRETT

July and August. After living in the same house for fifteen years, my husband and I moved from Rochester—upstate New York, a small city surrounded by farms—to Brooklyn. Our plan was to live for a year in the city, during which Barry would take a leave from his university teaching job, concentrating instead on his photography, and I'd hold a fellowship at the New York Public Library. Although Barry was excited and optimistic, I was mostly nervous: I'd written all my books in the same little room and feared my work might not weather the transplant.

Hopefully, foolishly, we'd signed a lease in May for a space behind a big hole in the wall of an industrial building in Williamsburg. Windows had filled the hole by the time we arrived on a hot July day; a floor had been laid, wallboard was up, appliances stood in the kitchen. But the appliances weren't connected, and neither was the gas; there was no hot water and no way to cook; no screens, no key for the door, no way to get mail; no phone lines or radiators or shelves or closet poles; no lights in the bathroom nor stair rails nor a thousand other things. An apologetic trickle of electricity flowed through an orange extension cord strung from a neighboring building: not enough to power an air-conditioner. Each time we entered or left we picked our way over rubble, unlocked a padlock, unwrapped a heavy chain binding the wire fence that caged us off from the street. At the stroke of eight each morning the polyglot crew arrived and began working loudly everywhere at once. We showered at the public pool and ate in the local bars, moaning and groaning all the while. At first it was funny, and then it wasn't.

Later it was funny again. Our first four weeks in Brooklyn were preposterous, ridiculous, a cosmic joke. In the muddy back courtyard three piglets appeared, wallowing and oinking and gaining weight until the night they were carried away, each one shrieking, to become someone's festival meal. By the end of that month—after the pigs and after the heat

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wave, which I spent largely immersed in a tub of cold water; after the bouts with no electricity at all and the weeks of jack-hammering; after the arrival of the giant spinning truck that submerged the pigs' former home (a garden-in-the-making, we'd believed) beneath a sea of red concrete—we were dining out on our disaster stories, our first-month-in-the-city tales. We joked that we'd moved to a third-world country: it was like Bosnia, like Beirut. What did we know? New York is a pit, I said cheerfully. I could say that because it wasn't true, because I had no idea what I was saying, because the worst was over.

* * *

By the end of August we had a home: we could shower, hang up our clothes, cook dinner, phone our friends. Most of the workmen were gone most of the time. I was starting to notice that, although our neighborhood was untidy and loud, I was interested in everything around me. My neighbors were people new to me, who'd come here from much farther than Rochester. Some were Polish immigrants, most of them elderly; they moved, talking under their breath, through a sea of recent young colonizers: artists, photographers, writers, and filmmakers. Construction sites all over the neighborhood brought in crews of workmen—Russian, Ecuadoran, Mexican, and Polish—until five or six languages rose from the morning streets. Our dog, an ill-bred, ill-behaved, somewhat scruffy pound-mutt disliked in Rochester, where the owners of poodles and borzois and Yorkshire terriers would cross the park to avoid her, here found herself a model of daintiness among a pack of pit bulls, Dobermans, Rottweilers, Great Danes, and peculiar crosses.

The subway, I discovered, would take me safely anywhere, at almost any hour: what freedom! And there was music, too—on the L train platform, and also at the Union Square station I passed through each day, someone was always playing: bass and saxophone, solo accordion, a pair of percussionists, one on trap set and the other on white plastic buckets and big glass bottles. Both underground and above I was surrounded by faces: so much emotion, so much expression, so many different countenances registering so many different things. In Rochester everything had been hidden. Here much was played out in public, before my eyes—and to my surprise, I liked this. There might be, I was learning to think (during those ten or eleven days of real life, during what felt like a kind of flowering) some reason to put up with the expense and inconvenience of living here.

T*uesday.* What kind of a city was this, where a plane—no, two planes—could crash into a building? I think I thought that: truly, everything that happened that day is muddled. I saw the second one hit, while I was walking home from the dogsitter's. The pilot had fallen asleep, the air-traffic system was down, someone had made an awful and clumsy mistake

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and something I couldn't imagine had happened: a hijacking never crossed my mind, I was too naïve to think that thought. But in a city where it sometimes seemed that nothing worked—in Brooklyn, I had told my family, everything is broken—a mistake of even this magnitude seemed possible.

It was my upstairs neighbor, leaning out the window and shouting down to me—I must have run to our building—who first used the word "they": some "they" had attacked the second tower. But who were "they?" Nothing he said made sense. My husband, now framed in our front window, looked similarly puzzled; I ran upstairs and we turned on the TV. Somewhere during those minutes we also first heard the words *terrorist* and *hijacking*. We looked out the window again. Then at the TV. Then we ran up to the roof.

In our part of Williamsburg, the East River is only a block and a half away and the buildings are low, a mixture of warehouses, three- and four-story tenements, and industrial buildings. Nothing impedes the view of the jagged wall of stone and metal across the river, so near it seems one can touch it. The other tenants—two young Brits, a photographer and a filmmaker; a ballet dancer from Mexico and her musician boyfriend; the older French photographer who'd called down to me—were already up on the roof, staring at what had always dominated the sky. Smoke rose from the towers; flames began to shoot from the sides; by then we were crying. The builder and a friend appeared, also some neighbors from next door, while the Brits, who had cell phones, called their families in London to say they were alive. All over the world, I realized, this must be on TV; in Florida, my mother would be terrified. I ran downstairs to call her.

When I returned, what I saw was impossible. Someone tried to explain it to me—the south tower had collapsed while I was gone—but I couldn't hear it; I turned again and again to the sight and each time covered my eyes and turned away. Where had the tower gone? Soon the builder said, in a low sad voice, "Shit. There goes the other one," and when I opened my eyes I saw the second tower unmaking itself, the sides curling away from the middle like skin peeling off a banana, the smoke spewing upward until everything was gone.

* * *

Why talk about the rest of that morning, the rest of that day? All of us were glued alternately to the desecrated skyline and the television, watching the same images again and again, each minute more deeply aware of the people who'd been inside those towers and what had happened to them. The trains closed down, the city closed down. No one knew what to do or say. At two that afternoon the L train opened; Barry took his camera and went into Manhattan, working his way farther and farther downtown—so far that he was uncomfortably close to building #7 when it came down. When he returned that evening to fetch more film, he convinced me to go back in with him. I should see this, he said: the way so

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much of daily life was still being lived; the tremendous social momentum that keeps us moving through the forms of life even after the heart has stopped. I would, he said, find the people and the sight of what still stood consoling. While I didn't believe that, I knew that if I didn't go into Manhattan soon, I would never go there again. I'd put the dog and cat in the car and start driving and never stop—as if I could drive away from this, or that it would matter, now, where I lived.

* * *

Below Houston, then below Canal: closed streets, tired cops, an endless line of trucks and bulldozers and cranes and flatbed trailers mounded with lights and generators, machines whose names I don't know parked end to end with their engines running and their headlights on, a procession that stretched for miles and seemed to pulse with longing to get going, to do something, to move toward their grim tasks, prevented from that by the fires burning at what was already being termed Ground Zero. But also, among the tired firemen trudging toward the nearest open subway station, at West Fourth, between the young police cadets and the Port Authority workers and the volunteer nurses and EMTs, we saw people walking dogs, pushing babies in strollers, sitting in bars and talking earnestly over supper and drinks. People on bikes. People holding hands. People unable not to do what they had always done, in the neighborhoods where they made their homes; people moving about, people living.

Where North Moore intersects with West Street, volunteers had gathered. Meaning to see what we could do, we joined the crowd. Cots and stretchers filled a courtyard rimmed with face masks, bottled water, food, all sorts of supplies. No one walked or crawled or was carried from the rubble and there was nothing for the rest of us to do. We could see the fire burning, still. The smoke was lashing through the crowd, the trucks still waited helplessly. So did we.

Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. We watch the TV, we read the papers, we watch the TV, we read the papers. We talk to people on the streets and in bars and cafés. At dusk we stand on abandoned lots at the riverside along with everyone else. We used to walk the dog here at night, in the silent but pleasant company of others who, like us, had picked their way through the broken grass and the holes in the fence, around the garbage and over the rocks, to get a taste of the breeze blowing up the river and a sight of the city, so close. Now there are hundreds of people here, faces glimpsed before at windows or on the subway platform or in the park. In silent ranks we watch the sun set over the smoking hole. The first night the cloud of smoke blew east, over Brooklyn Heights, and we could hardly smell it. But the wind has shifted since then, and, as the sun

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sets, the smoke drapes Manhattan like a scarf and slides across the water into our nostrils.

It rains on Thursday night, after bolts of lightning first strike so close by that sparks fly and our next-door neighbor's television and amplifier are fried: a steady, unrelenting rain pushed toward us by a strong wind blowing up the river. Before I think to close the front windows (which face the bridge, and used to face the towers), the rain pours through the screens, all over the sill and down the wall to the floor. I wipe up what I can. The next morning I head for the sill with a rag, having learned during my first city rainstorm that each drop coming through the screens leaves behind a dot of the filth it has carried from the air. Now the entire sill is dark gray, six linear feet of grime. What I dab comes up like ash and as I back away, the rag still in my hand, I realize that's what it is: ash of buildings, ash of planes. Ash of people.

Everything in the apartment is gritty, I now see. Table, floor, pillows and sheets; after that I can't stand to touch anything, and I can't sleep. Neither can Barry, who has processed his photos and is now obsessively editing them. He can't stop looking, and neither can I. We ought to stop looking, we ought to stop thinking like this, we ought to get in the car and go someplace, anyplace; we ought to do something to take care of everyone hurt, but we can't. We try to give blood and we can't do that either: for the moment every place is full. On the TV, banners run across the screen saying no more volunteers are needed, please don't come to these places to help, stop stop stop.

* * *

The dog paces nervously, trying to understand why we're acting so strangely. If a dog can think, we think she thinks this: Why can't I run at the river now; who are all these people? Why do they have candles in their hands? The smells in the wind make her nervous, too, along with our frantic comings and goings and the way that we're perpetually staring at glowing screens. The TV (we still can't stop watching). The screen at which Barry edits the digital versions of his photographs (he can't stop that either). The computers on which we try to retrieve and answer scores of e-mail messages, everyone either of us has ever known asking: Are you all right? Are you all right?

We are, we write back. Knowing we aren't, exactly; and also that we've been extraordinarily lucky. We write and write and write and write, and the more we say the worse we feel until finally we decide we shouldn't say anything at all.

* * *

What, then, are we supposed to say to all those people who ask, "Don't you want to go back to Rochester? Are you going back? You must want to

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go back." I *did* think of going, sometime after the first minutes, during the first hour; I was stopped not by courage or a sense of shared community but by the physical impossibility of leaving. The dog, the cat, two people, the car; I imagined us crammed with all the rest of Brooklyn onto the BQE, that narrow, broken-down, torn-up excuse for a highway. A sea of vehicles trying, like red blood corpuscles in a wounded capillary, to squeeze their way through the construction bottlenecks and across the bridges to the thruway: who was I kidding? No one was getting out of here, I thought despairingly on that first day; if something else was going to happen, then it would just have to happen.

Now the roads are working again, some of them, some of the time. But now leaving seems impossible for other reasons, which I can feel but can't articulate, even to myself.

* * *

On Thursday, when I go into my office nervously—the library remains open, like the museums; much is made of getting back to "normal life," of "not giving in to them" (whoever they are)—we all try to pretend we're working. No one is very convincing; less so after someone notices that people are stampeding down 42nd Street, in front of our windows, and that the street is now closed off. Uneasy minutes pass, during which we hear too many sirens and see too many police cars and too many running people, before learning that Grand Central and the Condé Nast building have been evacuated because of bomb threats.

President Bush is scheduled to visit Ground Zero on Friday. Traffic will be blocked, the trains will stop, security will be crazy everywhere: is going in worth it? I ponder staying home, feel like a coward, and solve the problem by waking Friday morning with an enormous migraine that I blame, in my bleary and delirious state, on the ash we are breathing: what is on my sills is also in my sinuses. Whatever the cause, I am sick. Certainly it's not my fault, then, that I don't go into Manhattan?

That evening, when I can see enough to walk, I return to the edge of the river with Barry, the dog, and a great many neighbors: the now-usual gathering, we stand and stare at the hole. Tonight we're joined by military transport helicopters flying low overhead, scanning us with their headlamps, and by fighter jets—four of them: F-16s, someone tells me—zooming back and forth in pairs, looping around the island. Since Tuesday the sky has been silent and empty, except for other ominous jets with their distinctive sound. These four extend their ellipses across the river and over us. Each time they pass us, I start to cry. Barry reminds me gently that they must be patrolling because of the president's visit; that they're American jets and won't attack us; that a war hasn't started, that *the* war hasn't started. A friend tells me I should welcome the sound: it means we are being protected.

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Saturday. For twenty-four hours, what seems most relevant to me are the New York City newspapers from July 30 and 31, 1916, reporting the last huge explosion in New York: the munitions storage site at Black Tom Island, near Jersey City and the Statue of Liberty. For months I'd been meaning to look at these papers, as research for a novel I hoped to write. Now the stories seem to have an entirely different, and urgent, point. All day I hide in the library, reading microfilm, obsessed with this and determined to share it with others. How analogous, I think. German sabotage was blamed; a wave of anti-German hate crimes followed; the United States was not yet in the war, but this would be one of the factors swaying public opinion toward participation. I print out sheaves of pages.

Later, this will seem crazy. Reading through those fuzzy copies, I'll notice that although thousands of people were shaken up, windows were broken not only in Jersey City but all across lower Manhattan and Brooklyn, businesses were damaged and warehouses burned, and two hundred people were initially reported dead, only a few people really died. Property damage, not mass slaughter. The pages are meaningless.

Sunday, Monday. The jets continue, the helicopters continue; these start to seem almost normal. Months ago I accepted an invitation to visit a school a few hours north of the city and talk to the students about reading and writing. As the school has decided to go on with the planned event (miraculously, not a single student has lost a relative, and everyone is eager, the headmaster says, to "return to normal"), I gingerly board a train on Sunday afternoon. A few seats down from me, a firefighter who's clearly been working for days—his face is drawn, his clothes are filthy, his hat is covered with ash, or worse—falls asleep before we leave the station. Across from him a man in his fifties thumbs through a news magazine, a special edition devoted entirely to September 11. When I look at him next he is weeping silently as he stares at whatever photo occupies the last page. Meanwhile the woman next to me, who clutches a bag labeled "Baby Gap," keeps looking over my shoulder. (Of course I'm still reading about the events, and staring at the photographs: why can't I stop this?) When I offer her part of my paper she accepts and then confides that she can't stop this either, indeed has been reading my pages surreptitiously. Russian-born, a recent immigrant, she lives in the suburbs and has a baby who, when the planes came, was staying with her father near Coney Island. Everyone is all right—but oh, she says. How terrified I was!

As we talk, the landscape beyond the window changes. Trees, lush green grass. Flowers, hedges, marshes, birds—it looks like paradise. White houses. How starved I have been, I realize, for a glimpse of nature. For a few moments I am madly homesick.

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And yet—although I stay in a guest room in a lovely house; although I walk across glistening fields that smell like hay, and gaze at old and beautiful trees; although the school's faculty members are immensely kind and the students are smart and attentive, as Monday passes I feel steadily odder, more disoriented, more unhappy. People here have seen the events on TV, rather than with their own eyes. They haven't smelled them or touched them or felt them. It's not their fault, they're not hard-hearted, they don't suffer from a failure of the imagination—it's simply that they are removed, and that their lives (of course!) are going on.

Don't I want them to go on? Don't I want the students studying, and necking in the corners, and worrying about their boy- and girlfriends, and if they have the right clothes and how volleyball practice will go and what will happen at the dance?

I do, and I also don't. I want to shriek at them and am horrified at my desire to shriek at them. I understand how unfair I am being. But all I can think about, by the end of the day, is how much I want to go home.

* * *

By "home," I mean Brooklyn.

* * *

I can't sleep, I can't work, I can't think. I can't afford to live here, nor can I do without the life and friends I left behind in Rochester. And so how, exactly, have I come to think of this place as home? When I walk the block and a half to the river now I see, instead of the giant towers that once filled the skyline, a hole that continues to smoke. Everything that fell into that hole, and everyone still living their lives around it, is what keeps me here and makes me feel that I can't bear to leave.

Later. If this were fiction, I would have stopped with the line above, on that note of muted adaptation. But the truth is this: the second week is harder than the first, and the third seems harder still. One night the first thing Barry tells me when I arrive home is that our car has been broken into and the CD player stolen. Without thinking, I ask, "Did they smash the windows?"

"No," he says.

"Then how did they get in?"

"I don't know. The doors are all locked, I checked."

We stare at each other, puzzled, until I remember that we have never *had* a CD player. When I point this out to Barry, he says, "But there's a big empty hole in the dash."

"That's always been there," I say carefully.

A long, silent minute later, he says, "I don't know. It just seemed like something was missing."

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* * *

We are, all of us, daily more exhausted and more distressed, battered not just by the constant grief and the new difficulties of daily life, but by the stories spreading through the city like a virus. In another context we might dismiss these as urban legends. Now there's no way of knowing whether they're true or false, unbearable fact or manifestation of what we most dread. They spread at the river shore, at the dog park, at dinner parties and hospitals, delineating the circles of damage and trauma: the friend who finds out, after days of ignorance, that an acquaintance was on one of the fatal planes. The young relative whose first day in New York includes a meeting with a friend who retrieved his car from Battery Park City and found the windshield spattered with blood and parts. The fellow dog owner whose journalist friend, walking through rubble near Ground Zero, saw a gun and holster on the ground and—thoughtfully, kindly, wanting no one else to be damaged—bent to pick it up and so, inadvertently, held for a second the fragment of torso it still enclosed. The medical students who, another acquaintance says, have volunteered at the morgue to help sort through and label the heaps of remains and whose lives are being reshaped by this experience.

Everyone has a story, or knows a story; they spread like shards of shrapnel, hacking parts off the people who hear them. Yet we can't, despite that, keep from repeating them; only repetition seems to make the wounds bearable. At a lunch delayed, and then finally held, all any of us can talk about are the events of the past weeks. Where we were when it happened and what we first knew; who knows the person to whom this or that happened; who lived, who died, who saw what unspeakable thing: the stories, the stories, the stories. On the table, which is in a lovely room filled with congenial people, in a nice restaurant on a pretty day, a long wooden tray filled with rows of green apples sits glowing, demanding to be recognized as beautiful and worthy. All of us look at it, all of us are for a moment consoled and refreshed. A minute later, all of us are bent close to each other again, urgently telling more stories. This is home now, I realize once more. This is where I live. This is not going to get easier.

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Double Exposure

D. GRAHAM BURNETT
MARIA BURNETT-GAUDIANI

The authors, brother and sister, recorded accounts of the morning of September 11 in their journals. D. Graham Burnett was in Princeton, New Jersey, at the time; Maria Burnett-Gaudiani was in midtown Manhattan.

GRAHAM BURNETT: A day of great strangeness. Of horror. I call my friend Jesse early, before 9:00 A.M. (knowing the baby will have had him up for hours) to ask about dinner in the city this Wednesday. As we speak, he suddenly asks me to wait, says he has just seen a report on the news that fire has broken out at the top of one of the World Trade towers. Could he call me back? I say sure, and I hang up. The toaster pops, and I arrange four slices of whole wheat bread on a large white plate. I carry this, my coffee, and the paper to the table. It is bright outside, and I do not turn on the light in the dining room.

Having the phone in hand, I call my sister, who left a somewhat morose message on my answering machine last night. When I reach her, she has the television news on and asks me if I have heard. I say yes, somewhat dismissively. I find television news deeply annoying and keep the TV in the basement. I'd rather read the story, whatever it turns out to be, tomorrow in the newspaper.

Maria's attitude, in these first moments, is a strange sort of glee. "It's really intensely beautiful," she declares, describing the plume of smoke rising from the side of the building into the crisp blue of the autumn morning sky. "Whoa," she blurts out, almost laughing, "it goes all the way through!" I have trouble imagining what she's talking about. "The smoke, it's smoking on both sides," she says. "The hole goes all the way through . . . my God, it's beautiful."

In these first moments—when it is still unclear what has happened,

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when the talk of an airplane hitting the building is still wild rumor, speculation—Maria's reaction is almost purely aesthetic. And though I scold her, somewhat ponderously, reminding her that there are people inside the building, I'm not really surprised by her response. For a full year she thought about nothing but these buildings, stared at their floor plans on her wall, stayed up most of the night for weeks grinding lucite blocks and welding tiny square brass rods, all to create jewel-like architectural models of the two towers for a senior-year architecture studio at Princeton. She lived and breathed the buildings, made countless field trips, Photoshopped images of them into strange distortions, interviewed the structural engineer who calculated each load-bearing strut. Maria could see each elevator shaft, each structural column, with her eyes closed.

Much of that time she fretted over the assignment: to create a design that connected the towers. Her solution was a conceptual work of considerable genius. Instead of creating a bridge of some sort, Maria undertook a much more ambitious reconfiguration of the towers themselves. She began by extending the footprint of each building so that their adjacent edges overlapped. Then she carved out a space between them, leaving the buildings linked at their bases and their crowns. But the drama, formal elegance, and critical intelligence of the design lay in the way she treated the negative space she had created between the towers. By cutting away their edges in a sensuous curve, she deftly conjured a new "gateway to Manhattan," a gore-shaped aperture more than ninety stories high, faced with glass, a slit in the skyline. The "phallarchitects," she noted with bemusement, had to be answered. But her design was more than a one-liner (admittedly, she and her studio mates had taken to calling it "The World Trade Yoni" in private)—it was a strikingly beautiful building. I was living in the city at the time, and came down to Princeton to see her final review. It was worth the train ride to see the look on the face of her professor when, after six months of poring over her models and drawings, he finally got the joke. One of her female classmates made a wisecrack as Maria began discussing her design. And then he got it, and I watched him get it, and I could see him shaking his head in disbelief, delight, and awe.

For Maria, then, this image on the screen—the pierced structure—is a grotesque realization of the architectural fantasy that she has cultivated for a very long time. And when she spots the smoke billowing from the side opposite the brutal gash, she sees the skyline of the city give vent to a dream.

And yet, of course, this is a real thing of glass and twisted steel.

I am skeptical about the story of a plane. "Can you see the fuselage?" I ask, and she says no. "Then it can't have been a plane," I say, and I remind her of the famous image of the military plane protruding from

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the façade of the Empire State Building after the disaster of 1944, which took place in a deep fog. "Nothing," she says. "You can't see anything." I press her to explain what she meant by saying the hole went "through." She can't see daylight through the hole, can she?

"No," she replies, "just smoke."

And then there is silence for a moment. "Jesus!" she says suddenly. And again: "Jesus!"

"What! What?" I ask, with mounting irritation that she seems to be making some kind of cosmic event out of the more or less banal reality of a rooftop fire in a skyscraper.

"Jesus Christ!" she exclaims again. "A fucking plane just hit the other building. . . . Jesus . . . A fireball—it must have been forty stories high . . . it just swung in and hit the other building."

That immediately resolves the question of what happened to the first building, and makes clear that these were intentional acts. Maria's other line rings, and I tell her to get it, because I want to go to the basement, bring up the TV, and see if I can figure out what is going on.

By the time I do this, Jesse calls back, and we talk briefly before being disconnected. I turn the volume down on the television, since the ticker tapes of breaking news run across the bottom of the screen, and the voices of the anchors are a continuous irritation.

It is now about twenty-five minutes after nine. The ticker says that there is a fire at the Pentagon, and I dismiss this as unrelated if true, and probably false. The networks seem anxious to nurse the hysteria, to make it throb. The image of the jumbo jet banking slowly into the elegant building and the image of the billowing nimbus of fire are apparently not enough.

By this time Maria's question (should she go to work in her office at the Empire State Building?) has been answered: all landmark buildings are being evacuated, including the UN and the Empire State. Then comes the first footage of the Pentagon. And now I feel the first real pang of fear. The ticker at the bottom of the screen says that the White House is being evacuated, and then the Hill. Then it says that there is a bomb at the State Department, a fire on the Mall. I look at my watch. It is 9:35. My wife's meeting at the White House this morning (she's briefing an Administration official on the status of Puerto Rico) is scheduled, if I remember correctly, for 9:30. Frantically, I begin dialing Christina's cell phone number. Circuits are overloaded. I hit Redial again and again, getting her voice mail once, but otherwise failing to get through.

But then there she is, breathless, but definitely alive. There are sirens and shouting voices in the background. She has literally just dashed out of the building. She describes the flight through the doors and onto the lawn. The swarm of suddenly fleet-footed lobbyists and staffers was

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greeted by MPs who waved them to one side, eyes on the sky, where the ominous hum of a lumbering passenger liner could be heard before the silver plane itself could be seen—whereupon the MPs began to shout that if the plane banked, everyone should turn and run the other way.

Those anxious moments have now passed, and the plane did not bank, but flew on, a true Flying Dutchman, since the FAA has just closed all the airports in the U.S.

Christina and I are loath to lose our connection, and it does not seem at all clear that D.C. is out of harm's way. Air traffic control reports on the news stations show as many as thirty planes still airborne in the Northeast alone, and no one can say for sure that they are all being flown by the pilots who got them off the ground. At the same time, the most immediate danger, it is clear to me, comes not from the sky, or from flying glass, but rather from the crowds, from a stampede of terrified beltway cattle started by a backfiring motorcycle. I ask Christina to get to the most open place she can find: away from buildings, yes, but even more important, away from people.

She is, as far as I could tell, in an open area on the Mall. And then the first tower comes down. What can I say about this moment? That I will never forget it? Sure. But what is worse, I am afraid, is that I will never really remember it. What is most distinctive for me in the experience is the curious position I occupy as a relay point between the live televised image and Christina, who can hear only my words. That is to say, I have to narrate, in real time, the most horrible single act of peacetime violence in human history. Outside, the day is like a picture: the bright sun picking its way between the silver-green leaves, the old brick of the courtyard dappled in the autumn light. A perfect day, in short. A day so beautiful that it seems a caricature.

"Oh my God," I think I say (what else can I say?). "Oh my God."

I don't have time to say "It's coming down" or "It's falling," because, in part (though it takes several seconds, and it is clear that the tower is collapsing), it is simply impossible to believe, and therefore impossible to say. I am acutely aware that I could sound like an ass—saying "It's falling," but then, after the smoke clears, having to say "Oh, wait, I see, no—it was just the façade," or "Wait, no, a portion broke away but it is still up." So I say only "Oh my God," and then, when the thing is done, when the thing has happened, when the great blossom of debris and smoke has spilled itself over the whole of lower Manhattan, and the light pillar of soot admits a view of the sky (partial, pink, where it ought not to be), then I can say, "It's gone."

"Gone?" she asks.

"Gone. It's gone. It fell."

"Gone?" she says again.

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"Nothing. There's nothing left. It's gone."

If there is a part of this image that I will truly never forget, it is simply the speed with which, once it buckles in the middle, the whole form unravels. What can one say? Like dust it goes. Like dry sand. Like (and it is like nothing so much as this) a tower of the finest, sifted flour. And yes, somewhat later, the other one goes, more dramatically, perhaps, since it yields its rigidity from the top down, elegantly, like one of my sister's fantastic origami structures suddenly unfolded from its form to a flatness whose drama derived from what it was the merest moment before.

"Nothing." But even there I hesitate, since, perhaps, when the smoke clears, we will see that sixty or seventy stories still stand. "Wait," I even say. But then, certainty. "Nothing. They are gone—completely gone."

And I hear Christina on the line, a soft voice, saying only, "Oh! That is very upsetting."

And we lose our line.

MARIA BURNETT-GAUDIANI: The phone vibration wakes me up, but I let the soft drilling sound continue while I sleep for a few minutes. The beep indicates a message, and in a simultaneous gesture, I call my brother back and turn on the television. Before he picks up, I see the smoking tower.

I know Graham's television has been gathering dust in the basement. Surely he doesn't know what is happening. To my surprise, he knows. "Yes, I heard. So, what does it look like?" he demands. I am silent.

The core. I am thinking about the building's core and skin as the helicopter camera drifts in and out. The mullions meeting and parting like rivulets washing down the façade. The beveled corners of the square footprint. In a moment, I smell my senior-year architecture studio. Acetone, burnt sawdust, spray paint, and cigarettes. With tiny trails of black on the skin between my left thumb and forefinger from cleaning the nib, I am inking my tenth floor plan. Microscopic particles of Plexiglas still cling to my nose hairs and make these final hours of work itchy and breathless.

"It goes all the way through," I tell him. "The hole is sort of plane-shaped and the smoke is pouring out from two façades. It's weirdly beautiful." And it's true. The perfect white tower is generating churning black clouds.

When the second plane hits, Graham ventures to the basement to retrieve his TV.

I have another call. An architect friend in mourning.

I call my father in Detroit. My grandmother tells me he is eating French toast and cannot come to the phone. It's an emergency, I tell her. I have another call. And then another. And then the lines go dead. I have

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always gotten by in New York City with just a mobile phone; at this moment it's clear that it would be nice to have a regular line. I am alone in a tiny apartment in the shadow of the Empire State Building, with nothing but a useless mobile phone and a television relaying Armageddon live. The first tower collapses, with a corner buckling in on itself. I am all alone.

In a strange panic, I grab my ID and my camera and venture to the gym on the roof of my apartment building. Inside, a crowd is lined up along the bank of televisions near the treadmills. No one runs. I look around for a familiar face, anything to assure me that if in fact New York City is under aerial attack, I will not perish alone. Then I see Jesus. Jesus. *He is laughing, leaning on a Stairmaster, making jokes in Spanish with* the other trainers and housekeeping staff, scratching at a huge new tattoo. As usual, when he sees me he breaks into Carlos Santana, "Oh, Maria, Maria." On any other morning, this would be the routine. I would smile, friendly flirting for the entertainment of the group would ensue, and I would move on. He would find me later and, away from the crowd, recount brutal stories that would linger with me all day—of stolen money orders, friends in jail, drug-wracked parents, and dreams of college, making money, and buying me things.

But on this morning, his face creates a rush of emotion. I grab his hand and drag him to the roof deck, drag him up to look at the picture-perfect view of Lower Manhattan. A few others follow. I hear myself quoting Leslie Robertson, the towers' engineer: "The towers are structurally dependent. They need each other. They are not two buildings." Then I say, "The second one will fall." This is a façade of knowledge, of knowingness, a mask over my sadness. I take one photograph of the remaining tower as it smolders, but by the time I lower the camera from my face, the tower is sinking, balanced and poised, elegant in its final moments, the aerial dropping like a plumb line. I can see the perimeter peeling away from the core. The man next to me asks if I have extra floppies for his digital camera. I turn away.

Back in my apartment, my phone is still lifeless. I knock next door. The Pakistani fashion designer lends me his landline phone, and I connect to a friend. As we make a plan to escape our isolation, I notice twin gilt frames on the walls of his entryway. In one, he stands smiling broadly, clutching Secretary of State James Baker. Baker's autograph masks the date. In the second, Florence Henderson clutches at my neighbor. Who is this guy? We've not met till now.

The next few hours are a haze of trudging to blood-donor sites, filling in forms at temporary clinics that patently reject my blood because of too many trips to the wrong places in Africa. I know they won't take me, but I cannot do anything else. I cannot remain in my apartment beneath the looming Empire State Building, and I cannot go to my office in the

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Empire State Building either. While I'm queuing at Bellevue, my phone manages to connect to my brother after two hours of dead lines. We've exchanged nothing more than hello when he suddenly breaks into sobs. I am five years younger than Graham—stubborn and aggressive by all female standards—but still I am his little sister. His tears of deep and dull sadness make me choke. I don't have words. Christina, I finally learn, is safe, evacuated from the White House. What was she doing down there?

I think briefly of leaving town, but the cartoonish NYC skyline on the Metro North schedule cuts into me and leaves me with a heavy guilt that I even entertained the thought. Now, for the first time, I feel an absence following me, a void that looms larger than any tower. This missing thing is more present for me at this moment than the towers ever were. As I walk through Manhattan, passing National Guardsmen and men selling American flags, I chastise myself for beginning to forget the details I swore I knew. Would I see the towers from this corner? Or this one? Could I see them separately or would they be overlapping? Where would the shadows fall? Could I see through the mullions at this time of day? But today there is nothing to orient me but the smoke.

In 1997, when my studio professor proposed connecting the two towers of the World Trade Center as a conceptual design project, I played with the idea of small bridges. He had clearly been inspired by plans for the Petronas Towers in Malaysia, so bridges seemed like the logical solution. As a world-renowned engineer, he knew entirely too well how complicated that would be. My series of tongue-in-cheek sketches—all deeply mathematically ignorant—were met with pleasant warnings of murderous falling ice, chasms of sliding glass, and reminders that concrete does not work in tension. So I left those ideas to the engineers in the class, and ventured out looking for something that my professor could never expect me to resolve mathematically.

Robert Maillart's Schwandbach Bridge proved to be the final inspiration. I tilted its graceful and efficient curve on end and pressed it into the side of the tower. If I pulled the footprint out, the towers would connect to form a seductive triangular gap where the curves crossed paths. True, I had once again found a structurally unsound and inefficient form for a tall building, but I loved the shape of the two towers outstretched as if to kiss over the skyline. I dragged friends on the Circle Line Tour; I used Photoshop to weave my imagined building into the fabric of Lower Manhattan. For the faculty jury, I scrawled "Welcome to New York" and made postcards with the Statue of Liberty framed in the lips of my skyscraper. I bought souvenirs and carved them to create tiny urban vulvae in snow globes.

I felt certain that my professors would eventually gather that I was proposing a kind of "yoni-tecture" for a new sort of skyscraper. I was as

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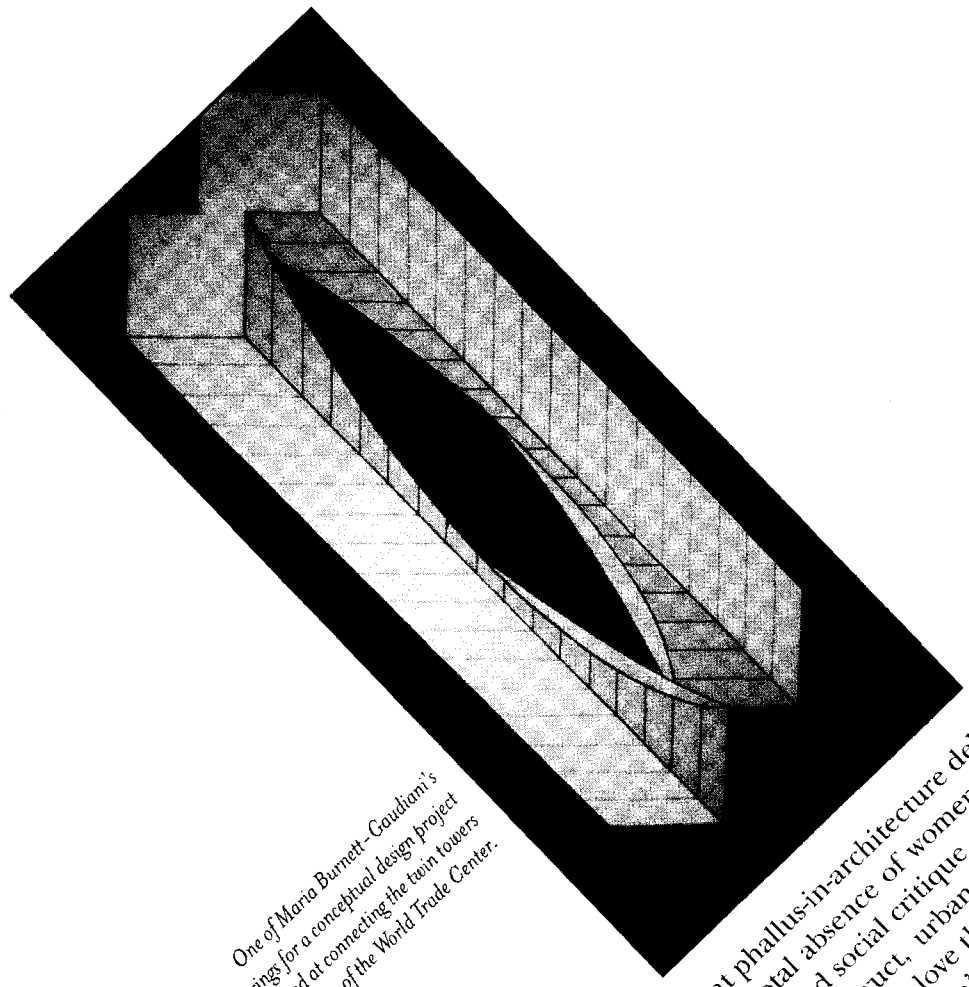

One of Maria Burnett-Gaudiani's renderings for a conceptual design project aimed at connecting the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

tired as the next female of the incessant phallus-in-architecture debate, of the dearth of female architects, of the total absence of women contending for major projects. But I meant no grand social critique. Using buildings as a tool to frame, rather than to obstruct, urban space seemed elegant. I suggested my own version, yet came to love the nuances of the towers as my knowledge deepened. Leslie Robertson's love for the towers transcended the steel and glass, and approached something almost spiritual. When we took a field trip to his offices, he enthusiastically regaled us with information. Photos of partial girder framing in a vermilion sunset. Statistics we could hardly fathom. An acre per floor. ("Maybe not the tallest, but you know Sears—The World Trade has far more real estate high in the air.") 176,000 tons of fabricated structural steel. ("Noted as a major event in welding history!") And stories. The excursion monitor on the roof did not even register the 1993 bombing. ("You see, the buildings are very structurally redundant.") And impenetrable calculations analyzing the impact of a 707, the largest plane flying when Robertson did his

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sums. ("I remembered the Empire State. I thought about planes. But I admit, I lie awake at night thinking about 747s.")

After calling everyone I know in NYC and most people who might be worrying about me, I think about Leslie Robertson. I am sure he barely remembers me, an eager architecture student who appeared to mock his life's work years ago. And he was intimate, generous, and encouraging. Irony and subversion—these are, in a way, easy; but to create something great and lasting, this is not easy at all. Leslie Robertson, a great engineer, knew this all along. Each day, I find a new corner from which to reconstruct those towers in my mind: 34th and Sixth, 13th and Hudson.

On Wednesday, September 12, I buy a World Trade Center snow globe in Times Square for mental safekeeping.

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In Morocco

DAVID LEVERING LEWIS

When it finally happened, it was as if I had never entertained the possibility of such a catastrophe. Ruth and I learned of the assault upon New York and Washington on our first day in Rabat, when a young Moroccan trailing our steps in the Kasbah des Oudaias refused to be brushed off. His broken French, repeated with increasing urgency, finally registered: Were my wife and I Americans, and had we heard about the planes crashing into the tall buildings and into the Pentagon? Suddenly the reason for being in Morocco on the morning of September 11 seemed utterly preposterous, a mission mocked in midflight from New York in the most ghastly fashion. My intention to write a book about the enlightened influences of early Islamic Spain, *The Islamic Invention of Europe,* seemed instantaneously stripped of all revelatory propitiousness. Before such thoughts were consigned to the limbo of incommensurable irrelevancies, I did wonder what the general American reader could now be expected to make of the hypothesis that the world as we know it today had evolved from epic events in eighth-century al-Andalus. How reasonable would she find the proposition that feudal Christendom, emerging from the Roman Empire's wreckage, had locked itself to developmental retardation by remaining outside the Islamic ecumene, and, therefore, that Charles Martel's victory at Poitiers over the more advanced Muslims streaming across the Pyrenees had been no boon to European political, economic, religious, and cultural development?

Once Ruth and I feigned enough composure to be led to the home of an American embassy couple, our stupefaction as we assimilated the news on CNN became as measureless as it had been in that horrific where-were-you moment when John F. Kennedy's assassination changed everything. Like many others, I had come to believe that it was only a matter of

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time before a horrendous act of terrorism would be visited upon the United States. The logic of Islamic terrorism appeared to me to be transparent as each dress rehearsal—World Trade Center I, the Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the Nairobi and Dar es Salaam embassies, the USS *Cole* in Yemen—advanced the timetable of some apocalyptic desecration. But the magnitude of September 11 surpassed in diabolical savagery, surreal execution, and inspired symbolism even the most maleficent scenarios I had imagined. Sitting cross-legged with our American hosts, my wife and I squeezed hands as we grieved through repeated replays of the aerial jihad and listened, benumbed, as estimates of the dead climbed obscenely. I know that Muhammad (our rebuffed Kasbah guide) must have sensed the unverbalized anger in the room, for he took it upon himself to commiserate on behalf not only of all the people of Rabat, but of *"tous les marocains, et même tous les arabes partout dans le monde."* If whoever had done this awful thing was a Muslim, Muhammed repeated as he took his leave with a gratuity, he had violated the teachings of the Qur'an.

We encountered only empathy and compassion among Moroccans in the days to come. Seventy percent of the kingdom's people are under thirty years of age, and forty percent of these young people have little or no regular employment. Heavy dependence upon tourism makes even ordinary Moroccans alert to political and economic fluctuations in Europe and the United States. That the horror unfolding in New York and Washington was likely to cause a global travel drought instantly appalled hotel staffs in Fez, merchants in souks in Marrakech, and Muhammeds strategically posted in Kasbahs and medinas. Osama bin Laden's seemingly insensate grievances against the United States were as unwelcome as a plague would have been to most of the subjects of this beautiful country. Yet if there were good bread-and-butter reasons to say a kind word to two dazed Americans, most of the expressions of grief and horror we heard were also undoubtedly genuine. A perfect stranger approached to remind us that Morocco had been the first country in the world to recognize the independence of the thirteen American colonies. With its *villes nouvelles* built under French rule, its thin French crust evident in smart places, its sidewalks causeways for the slim unveiled, Morocco must surely be one of Al Qaeda's nightmares: an ancient, gentle Sunni society relatively unfazed by Western influences and doing its utmost to accelerate its modernization.

We knew that we were temporarily marooned in this Muslim country, completely dependent upon the famous Moroccan hospitality and the Qur'an's injunctions about visitors. "Fortress America is closed," the BBC anchor had intoned with chilling gravity. Yet Ruth and I felt secure enough the next morning to keep to our plans and head by car for Fez. The voice on the embassy telephone reassured us that Americans were not at risk, but it supplied a special number just in case. The odd truth

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was that in our first days here, our greatest anxieties arose from speculations about the decisions likely to be taken by our own government. After all, before September 11, the Bush administration had announced an end to American observance of the ABM Treaty, committed itself to a quixotic Maginot line in space, dismissed the environmental goals of Kyoto, and gone out of its way to find reasons not to attend the Durban conference on racism. We envisioned the inexperienced, unprepossessing president reaching into his Texas boyhood for guidance as fateful orders were transmitted to B-52s and stealth bombers from an underground command and control center somewhere in the American heartland. We dreaded a scorched-earth U.S. response inspired by the *lex talionis* of Hammurabi; we held our breath in fear of unilateral solutions to Taliban terrorism modeled on the O.K. Corral—some monstrous tit for tat in which neither the European Union nor the United Nations was consulted.

The other shoe had not yet dropped when Ruth and I crossed the Strait of Gibraltar from Ceuta on Saturday. By then, under the calming influence of an eighteenth-century palace hotel in the Fez medina, our mood had become more stoic. The world would survive. Our beloved New York would rebound. The Taliban regime would be dispatched to the Stygian darkness whence it came. U.S. policy vis-à-vis the Israelis and the PLO (which was cited repeatedly in Spain and France as a major reason for Muslim fanaticism) would be recalibrated. I recovered the historian's nerve that had brought us to North Africa and the Iberian Peninsula in the first place. In the days ahead, as we retraced the eighth-century invasion route of Tariq ibn Ziyad's Berber and Yemeni cavalry up the spine of Visigothic Spain, it seemed to me more useful than ever to write a book about a time when Islam was less than a century old and Europe had yet to be invented.

As I look back across the graveyard of history's turning points, it seems evident that the reversal of the roles these two civilizations have come to play was largely fixed in the fifty years between Poitiers (732) and Roncevaux (778). The one—once tolerant of other faiths, open to science and philosophy, and commercially powerful—recoils increasingly as it confronts these same values in the other civilization, whose erstwhile religious intolerance, intellectual obscurantism, and economically stifling feudalism had long since dissipated in the globalizing Euro-American ecumene. The book's working hypothesis might prove unpopular or, worse, even wrong, but I hoped that it might be read as a game effort to stir more informed discussion about what our edition of the *International Herald Tribune* provocatively called a clash of civilizations.

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Primary Questions

ISABEL FONSECA

"New York City, just like I pictured it," I think, hearing the Stevie Wonder song in my head as I arrive in downtown New York, my town, my neighborhood. ("Skahscrapers 'n' ever'thang," the song continues.) Except it isn't. The view from my old corner—normally a clear shot of the Towers—on this hot September night is not, as I expected, of an absence. Instead, a full two weeks after the attack, down at the site, under a lane of deep-blue sky, there rises a mesmerizing, slow-moving waft of opaque smoke, colored a dramatic iridescent white by the floodlights still blazing for the sifters and diggers below. It's like nothing you've ever seen, but it's also, somehow, familiar.

Looking back down at the street, my street, whose cracks and dips and drains and grates I still know by heart, I see just what the smoke reminds me of, and here it is in individual portion: a steaming manhole, that quintessential New York item, now powerfully evocative of something absolutely non-native, a damply gleaming echo. Or pre-echo. Why have I never wondered about them before, these ghostly emissions, opalescent in the indeterminate light, in these indeterminate times?

That is what it is like in New York these days. Nothing looks quite the same. Or, rather, everything feels supercharged.

Ray's Pizza, on the corner of Sixth Avenue and 11th Street, certainly doesn't look like itself. It's become a shrine, the windows plastered with posters of missing people. Still holding my suitcase, I stand alongside other non-missing people, some crying, some holding their hands over their mouths, and read every one of the several hundred legends typed or scrawled beneath the faces. The story, any single story, is enough; almost too much is the intimacy of pictures grabbed for the scanner from

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people's bedside tables and desks and albums. The flyers do not resemble the Wanted posters that President Bush, in a rare moment of reversion to type, referred to. Most of them show domestic good times (and many feature babies).

"Missing person" is, of course, a hopeful euphemism, and clearly a necessary one (the tag is universal) as well as a legalistic one. In the United States, until this massacre you had to be missing for several years before you could be declared dead. In his wisdom, Mayor Giuliani has ordered that things be speeded up. Acceleration must be the hallmark of our era. So much so fast—and so early.

But the missing person's opposite number is not the found person (though there is a notable supply of new curbside prayer kiosks in my hometown). It's another missing person. Another lost soul: the one or ones who put up the poster. Nothing euphemistic in their missing—or in their yearning and need-to-know and need-to-hope. They are missing their husbands and fathers and sisters and sons and friends (a surprising number of the posters have been put up by friends), frantically and desperately and with awesome stoicism. The signs are handwritten and misspelled; they are high-tech, color-separated, laminated. They are pleading ("Please call day or night if you have ANY information of ANY kind!!!!"); they are bristling with vital statistics (DOB; height; weight; last-seen-wearing).

Most strikingly, they are inclusive: no color or group or race or shape appears to have been left out of this unwilling brotherhood, either in the pictures or, looking around, among the faces of those peering at their descriptions, or indeed of the people eating pizza. Of course—this is New York. But is this the time to be eating pizza? A typical non sequitur of this trip and, indeed, of these strange times. As is the thought that in New York pizzerias are called "pizza parlors." I cannot help free-associating. Pizza parlors. Funeral parlors. Parlors: that quaint, not otherwise much-used word for the room at home where people gather for no reason other than to gather (all other rooms have dedicated functions). The mood of New Yorkers at the moment is that of a huge self-help group, a gathering in our common parlor. For apart from the rescue workers, we have no dedicated purpose: we've no idea what to do, and on the streets, at least downtown, everyone understands this without its having to be said. There is a new latitude. It extends even to pets. Later, as I sit in a sidewalk café on Greenwich Avenue with my sister and her loudly barking beagle, a passerby pauses to comfort the dog: "You don't even know what's happened, do you?"

I came to New York with the hope of relief from intense restless paralysis, from engulfing anxiety, from an inability to work, even to read (anything not about September 11, 2001). It isn't working, but it is making some things a little clearer, a little more irrefutable.

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The next morning I awake at 5:30. Is this jet lag? No, it's just jet. I know all the noises in the house and on the block where I grew up: the rumble of the subway passing nearby; the hum of the great generator systems belonging to St. Vincent's, the hospital that occupies our block's other corner and that is now also a shrine. Posters, guttering candles, heaps of flowers. And, the day of the attack, rows of hospital beds lining our street, awaiting the wounded. Who never arrived. Only their images came in great numbers, and their faces make up a vast patchwork quilt on the hospital wall. The posters have been carefully moved from the pavement into the shelter of the hospital's covered entranceway, in order, as a typed sign explains, "to protect them from inclement weather." The helplessness is palpable, as is the unmixed desire to do something, anything, to help someone represented here.

What about those screaming plane noises so early in the morning and nowhere near an airport? There is a siren, an ambulance, I think; a fire engine; and, unmistakably, a screaming plane, as in the moment just after take-off, scoring the sky. Have the sounds changed over the decades? Not really, not here. It's the ear that has changed. The low hum plus the burning, scoring sound: it's out there, but it's also inside us. Just as the endlessly looping footage of the devastated towers, of a tiny person waving something from a high window, appears unbidden before the mind's eye, there is this unspecified internal buzz or throb—fear, I guess it is. When I was small, the hospital generator sounded comforting, like a cozy, inefficient old radiator. It hummed and purred. A pet. The pet is now a monster.

Walking downtown through SoHo and Tribeca toward the site of the wreck, I pause at Canal Street and think how much more representative this neighborhood is of our city and our world than the Twin Towers were. It is teeming with gadgets and bargains and, of course, life. Bursting from stores and laid out on the pavement, it's all here: the some-of-what-you-fancy and the who'd'a'thunk it; the rip-off designer gear; the dozens of kinds of hinges; the dazzling array of plumbers' "jewelry"; the three-story-high trove of Chinese junk; the world's biggest paint store; the smell of a dozen different cuisines cooking. For every odd item there is an odd buyer: the exoticism and the internationalism are overwhelming. Anyone can make it here. You can't help thinking that the whole of the Taliban Council would go unnoticed walking down Canal Street.

Before this fizzing mix, the notional "typical New Yorker" was an old-style Brooklyn cabbie. This week he has come out of retirement, and his mandate as our collective conscience has broadened from "Don't even think of parking here" to (as one Canal Street poster puts it) "United we stand. Divided we fall. One Nation indivisible under God, with Liberty and Justice for all. You got a problem with that?"

Finally, from the barrier at Chambers Street, and a distance of about

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ten blocks, you see it—a hulking, smoking wreck; a rusted steel-and-rubble heap twenty stories high; a haystack made of giant needles, blunted and ruined. And you don't need the physics: to see it is to know, absolutely, that no one inside it can have survived. Seeing the wreck proves useful in the way that seeing the corpse of someone you love is useful (an experience to be denied the families who have come here to grieve). Only your own eyes can give you the information you need: They're gone. That escape you worked out in your imagination, the void with air and water that you carved out in the subway system for them . . . it didn't happen. They're lost.

Policemen from all over have come to draw the line: our own NYPD; state troopers in gray uniforms and countrified brown felt hats. But they're not so unusual; they come out for natural disasters. Then you see the National Guardsmen, with their big guns and their jungle clothes, some of them stretched out on curious little dune buggies. They are incongruous in every sense, and seem to be there mainly to be suggestive. And we do get the message.

Across from the barrier, on a little traffic island or traffic reef, is another shrine: more candles, more moldering flowers, more posters of trapped people. I keep making eye contact with a very beautiful Indian girl. Another of the faces seared on my mind is that of a Jamaican man with a gorgeous smile. "Seared" is also seared on my mind, ever since I read about a burn victim who at first appeared to the specialist doctor to have, miraculously, survived unscathed, or unseared, until he realized that the smooth skin on her legs was not skin but melted nylon. The posters give us many details—this daughter has a mole below her left buttock, this husband has a KO tattooed on his left arm—as if these people were wandering around in a daze somewhere and didn't know who they were. But they're not. It is we who are wandering around in a daze.

Primary questions are in the air. My four-year-old daughter recently posed the big one: How are babies made? I didn't quite reach for "When a man and a woman love each other very much. . . ." We talked in metaphors—seeds/eggs; gardening/cooking—and, yes, about love. To my relief, she didn't require technical details. We've done life, then. And now it's all death. My daughter is not aware of two people jumping out of the window together, holding hands, as her little New Yorker cousins are. She does not know about those last phone calls, those last words of "I love you very much." For Fernanda right now, I think the creation of life most resembles a recent kindergarten project of making heads out of potatoes and other vegetables and toothpicks. Death, on the other hand, resists metaphor, and she has been pressing me with technical questions: "How does the plane keep on going if the driver of the plane is dead?" But the answer, the truth, is inaccessible to her as it is, in different ways, to us all. She has to work it out for herself. Here is where she has got so far:

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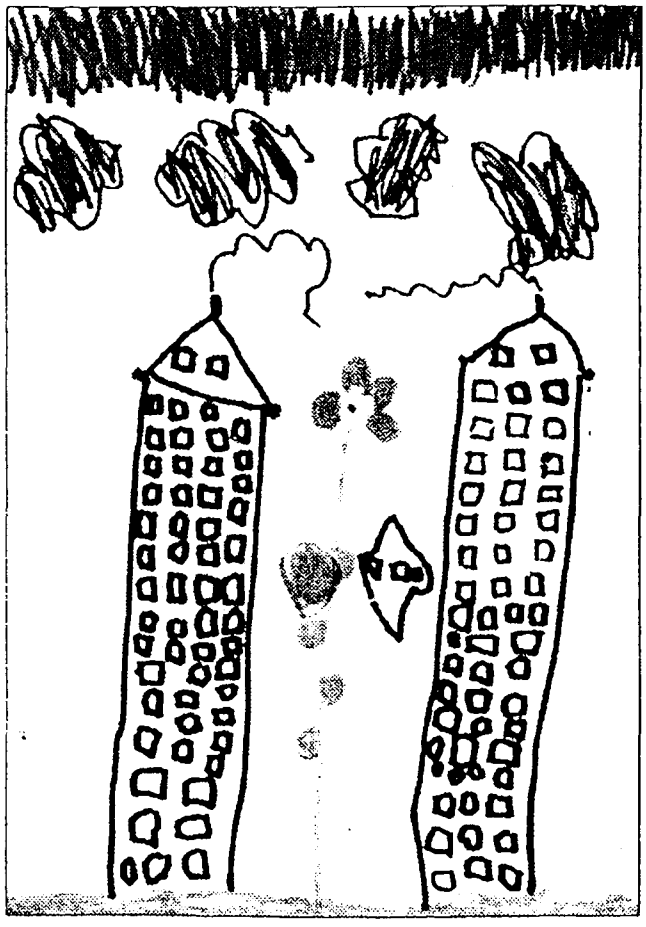
A drawing, spontaneously undertaken, of two towers, each crowded with windows. A "row" of sky at the top, and then a row of clouds. A spume of smoke curling out from the tip of each tower. In between the towers, a small airplane, tilted to show both wings. Also between the towers, and equal to them in height, a very sturdy flower, missing one petal.



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Dancing to Distant Tunes

PENELOPE LIVELY

My family has photograph albums that go back more than a hundred years. Beneath the family groups—picnicking, posing tranquilly in the garden, marrying, displaying new babies—the years have been inked in: 1914, 1918, 1939, 1941, 1945, 1963. . . . Behind and beyond those frozen moments of private lives there is the echo of public events, of the inexorable directive of history. Each time I take a wander through the albums I am reminded of that remorseless manipulation of all our lives—the way in which we dance to distant tunes.

None of us took a photograph on September 11, 2001. If we had, that date, too, would lie there, a loaded reference, significant in ways that we cannot yet know; one of those times when the seismic shock of what has happened sends waves into individual privacies the world over. A myriad of people will be affected: the course of their lives shifted at that moment. They chose what to have for breakfast, but a far more powerful force stepped in to make more crucial decisions.

I have always been mesmerized by this unholy marriage of choice and contingency. The theme has directed some of my fiction. The novelist, of course, plays God—or the Devil: fiction can be a laboratory in which to demonstrate the respective roles of private deliberation and public direction. All of us think we lead private lives, unwilling to acknowledge the footsteps that pad behind, the perpetual threat of that hand on the shoulder that will propel us in a direction we do not want to take. To juggle with this truth in a novel is to exercise all the divine powers of contrivance given to the novelist—it is absorbing, demanding, illuminating. You create characters, bestow on them free will and judgment, and then snatch the rug from under their feet by introducing the malign interference of public events. It is art, craft, a tissue of lies—or whatever fiction may be.

The novelist Penelope Lively lives in England. Among her more than thirty books are *The Road to Lichfield, A House Inside Out, Moon Tiger* (Booker Prize, 1987), *Passing On, Cleopatra's Sister,* and *A Pack of Cards.*

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At the same time, you mirror this process yourself, for real. I am of the generation that remembers the Cuba crisis, all too well. I had young children then, and I can still see the TV screen of those days, with the pulsing concentric rings that preceded the news bulletins, and can re-experience that icy chill to the stomach. I can remember thinking that my children might not grow up. They have, and are parents themselves. Private life won out, by the skin of its teeth. There is not a sensible comparison to be made between 1963 and 2001. The dangers today are disparate and unquantifiable. But this time, thousands of people have died and many more have been catastrophically affected. It is both more immediate, and less so.

Once again, the entire world has had a stinging reminder that we had better not be so perverse as to think that we can go our own sweet way. The hand of fate, of course—the eternal human problem. Religion is the traditional solace. But for those of us unable to subscribe to a faith, there is small comfort. The fatal interventions against which we have no defense may of course be the road accident or the cancer cell: I'm concerned here with the majestic decisions of history. In the face of history, religion cannot offer much comfort either—though, as we are only too grimly aware, it does a great deal to determine it. I live in a country that has seen a sobering display of religious persecution over the centuries—the landscape remains stained by it, if you know how to look. I once had a character in a novel say, frivolously: "History is ghastly. . . . One should be glad it's over." Unfortunately, it is not. We are in the thick of it, and we have just had a warning dose.

Humankind cannot bear very much reality. Most of us felt that on September 11, and fled the TV screen to talk to our nearest and dearest. I talked to friends in America. "I just need to hear your voice," we said to each other.

Eventually, that day will settle into its proper significance, in the long view of things. We do not know yet what it has really meant. But, living in the immediate aftermath, there is an extraordinary consciousness of the inescapable apposition of choice and contingency. When I am being a novelist, I see this as a fascinating subject for fiction, something that provides rich opportunities for narrative, for exploring the ways in which people deal with the malevolence of fate. It is an inspiration, an indulgence. It allows me to invent, devise, imagine. But once I am back with my own life, then it is I who am directed by those bleak uncaring winds of time. We all cope differently with that stark fact: we pray, we deny, we rage, we accept. Nothing will change any of it. But a state of mind can be a fortification. Right now, we need such fortifications.

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Affliction

CARLO ROTELLA

"Before I knew what affliction meant," wrote Mary Rowlandson in her account of being captured by Indians during King Philip's War, "I was ready sometimes to wish for it." Until sunrise on February 20, 1676, the "dreadful hour" when she woke to find friends and neighbors already "bleeding out of their heart-blood upon the ground" and the smoke of burning buildings "ascending to heaven," she had "lived in prosperity, having the comforts of the world about me, my relations by me, my heart cheerful, and taking little care for anything." But the very easiness of those pre-tribulation times had made her uneasy; she had wondered why the Lord did not visit sorrows upon her. If, as her Bible said, "whom the Lord loveth he chastiseth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth," then to live without affliction was to live at the margins of the Lord's attention. So, looking backward at the end of her account, she found a curious sort of relief in having suffered through the bloody raid and eleven hard weeks of captivity before coming home at last: "But now I see the Lord had His time to scourge and chasten me. The portion of some is to have their afflictions by drops, now one drop and then another; but the dregs of the cup, the wine of astonishment, like a sweeping rain that leaveth no food, did the Lord prepare to be my portion. Affliction I wanted, and affliction I have had, full measure (I thought), pressed down and running over." She had come to understand the brittle shabbiness of the life she had made prior to the day of the attack, a life built of "outward things" that are "the vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit, . . . they are but a shadow, a blast, a bubble, and things of no continuance."

And there, after a final injunction to rely wholly on God for salvation, Rowlandson arrived at her *finis*. Her narrative was published in 1682. For 320 years she has been lying awake in those closing paragraphs—"when all

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are fast about me, and no eye open, but His who ever waketh"—in fearfully ecstatic contemplation of "the awful dispensation of the Lord towards us." These days she has plenty of company in sleeplessness, if not in ecstasy.

Even with Rowlandson's help, it took me a while to identify relief as the odd element in my—and, I think, our—response to the events of September 11. I am not Puritan enough (who is, anymore?) to take heart in the belief that the Lord must love us because he scourges us. Rather, I woke up one morning a couple of days after the 11th and realized that for the first time in my adult life I was not secretly half-expecting an imminent blow that would knock the cozily arranged components of life as I know it to irretrievable pieces. I had been walking around for twenty years in cringing expectation of an actual physical impact that would signal the dreadful hour's arrival. Because so much of what is wrong with us is compressed into our cars—and because I live in Boston, where angry incompetence behind the wheel is pandemic—I had assumed that the shock in question would be that of one car hitting another with me inside. But when the planes hit the buildings, my half-expectation of imminent impact evanesced, ascending to heaven like smoke.

An eccentric millionaire playing at holy warrior—a villain of comic-book grotesquery, equal parts Howard Hughes, Charles Manson, and Cat Stevens—served us a taste of the wine of astonishment. It awakened me to the most unlikely of thirsts, a wish for affliction, already working within me and more generally within American culture.

Like many people I know (granted, a sample of humanity short on those who greet each new day with a smile and have a cheery word for everyone), I switched quickly from feeling that the events of September 11 were dreamlike and unreal to accepting them as perfectly normal instances of the world's regular functioning. At the same time, the fantasy of perfectible safety that has flourished in American culture over the last two decades graduated from minor annoyance to suicidally foolish delusion. Dreamlike and unreal? How about armored vehicles for commuters, seemingly designed to ensure that we go to war in the Middle East from time to time so we can keep filling their giant gas tanks at bargain prices; a missile defense shield instead of a foreign policy; a widespread expectation that we can fight a war without a single casualty on our side; gated communities that offer the fleeting impression of security at the cost of making public life increasingly unsustainable; threat-neutralizing incantations (Do Not Ingest, No Step, Do Not Douse with Gasoline and Set On Fire) on anything that might conceivably give somebody a boo-boo . . . how's *that* for dreamlike and unreal?

We seem to have willed ourselves to forget, officially, for a couple of decades, that a whole country cannot order Domino's, screen its calls, and hunker down in front of the TV in the vague hope that everything will be okay. Compared to most of those with whom we share the planet,

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Americans (including those who have reason to regard themselves as unlucky or oppressed) lead a collective life of fabulously heedless let-them-eat-cake profligacy. Sooner or later, this state of affairs was going to inspire somebody to do something bad to us as a people, and we (again, as a people) should have prepared in advance for such an inevitability. Since September 11, as we return to something more like waking life, we have been remembering what we chose to forget. We forgot that highly motivated unreasonable people will, as a matter of course, hurt blameless individuals just because they can. We forgot that we cannot control all the consequences of our behavior, and that therefore we would do well to envision those consequences as well as we can before we act. We forgot, most critically of all, that it is imperative to know the world in which we move, and to know it intimately at street level and from a variety of perspectives, rather than watching highlight loops of it on cable and hoping the alarm system will keep it all safely out there while we cower inside, quivering piles of weight-room muscle or food-court fat in fuzzy sweat clothes. Hey, we forgot. It happens.

Of course, we did not really succeed in forgetting, or even in trying to. If we closed our eyes and pulled the covers over our heads, it was because we knew there was a monster in the closet, and we did find ways to imagine that monster. As Jeanine Basinger, Anthony Lane, and others have pointed out, we have been rehearsing the events of September 11 for those same twenty years in our popular fantasies—quintessentially in the action movies that have perfected the formula of explosions, collapsing buildings, malign perpetrators, and special-effects bystanders sent pinwheeling by gouts of orange flame. The action movies of the 1980s and 1990s stink of hubris and ingratitude; in retrospect, they seem to suggest that a whole culture was asking for it (which is not the same thing as deserving it when it happens).

But retrospect has also imbued the genre with, of all things, a moral charge. The composite rolling cinematic fireball produced by Hollywood over the last two decades is more than a mere blast, more than just a thing of no continuance that vexes the spirit. In light of the definitive explosions of September 11, the many fake ones that preceded them now seem to indicate a readiness to wish for affliction before we knew what it meant. All those unconvincing last-second saves by heroic protagonists (5 . . . "The red wire or the blue wire?" . . . 4 . . . "Dude, pick one!" . . . 3 . . . "Okay! Red! No, blue!" . . . 2 . . . snip . . . "Phew, it's Miller Time") were never the point. They were, rather, part of the necessary apparatus of fantasy, the synthetic sweetener that masked the strong taste of the wine of astonishment. We were asking for it, in code, the way Mary Rowlandson was asking for it: even as we dreamed the black-lotus dream of a hermetic life, we felt the urgent need to awaken in time to save ourselves.

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I am not attempting the doomed trick of finding a silver lining in the events of September 11. The dream-ending, or at least dream-attenuating, effect of the blow does not make anybody's suffering worthwhile or proper. The papers are full of bad news and the expectation of more bad news; my fellow citizens are filled with worry and anguish; members of my family are in harm's way. But I would not accept the dream's return, if that were even possible; I did not want to dream it in the first place. We were always in harm's way; the bad news was always coming; we should have been more engaged, less thoughtless, more vigilant, less satisfied.

We are, of course, not done with make-believe, as our new set of post-September-11 delusions will attest. We take Cipro superstitiously when we are not sick, even though we know that by doing so we damage the drug's chances of working against future illness. We put up with far too much talk of a war of good against evil, rather than of one set of interests against another: it is still strictly business, even if the other side has generously ceded the moral high ground. The president insists that he believes in a universe "of moral design," even though all leading indicators point to a darker and more chaotic truth that might be more effectively addressed by a more hard-boiled philosophical system. None of this is an improvement.

But if the shocks of September 11 were always on the way—and if, by refusing to see them coming, we made them more likely to happen and worse in their effect when they did—then as a people we are better off now than we were before the dreadful hour's arrival. Even the current national climate of huffing righteousness, conditioned as it is by an enlivened sense of limits and consequences in a complex world, amounts to a significant improvement over, as a friend put it in a recent e-mail, "being a big stupid bully." Like many other citizens put off by the autoerotic flexing and world-historical bad manners of post–Cold War national style (I mean, did America have to rip off its figurative football helmet and thrust its index finger in everybody's face after every three-yard gain?), I am less embarrassed to love my country than I was before September 11. And, to put it crudely, I like our long-term chances better than I did before. A necessarily imperfect engagement with the world is infinitely less dangerous than the dream of perfectible disengagement.

"I can remember a time," wrote Mary Rowlandson near the end of her narrative, "when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together, but now it is other ways with me." With us, too, if we are lucky.

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Pluralism, Intolerance, and the Qur'an

ALI S. ASANI

Infuse your heart with mercy, love and kindness for your subjects . . . either they are your brothers in religion or your equals in creation.
—from a letter written by the Muslim Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661) to Malik al-Ashtar on the latter's appointment as governor of Egypt

As a Muslim involved in teaching and scholarship on the Islamic tradition, I have received many invitations over the past several weeks to speak about the role that religion and religious ideas may or may not have played in the horrific events of September 11, 2001. Non-Muslim audiences have wanted to know how Islam, a religion whose very name signifies peace for many Muslims, could be used to promote violence and hatred for America and the West? Why, many in these audiences wonder, are some Muslims and some governments in Muslim nations anti-American, antagonistic to America and the West, and willing to condone or even applaud the loss of innocent American lives? For their part, Muslims I have spoken to have similar concerns. Why, many of them wonder, are some Americans and Europeans and some American and Western policies anti-Islamic, antagonistic to Muslim interests, and heedless to the loss of innocent Muslim lives? In an atmosphere rampant with stereotypes about the "other," I have been engaged in providing audiences with historical and religious perspectives on the complex factors that have created such deep and profound misunderstandings among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. While I have participated in many public forums, this has also been a time of reflection for me personally as, indeed, for many Muslims who are bewildered by the bizarre and repug-

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nant behavior of individuals who committed these acts allegedly in the name of God.

The paradox of a religious tradition being used to promote harmony and tolerance on the one hand, and to justify war and intolerance on the other, is not unique to Islam. History shows us that all religions, particularly their scriptures, have been interpreted by believers to justify a wide range of contradictory political, social, and cultural goals. The Qur'an, the scripture believed by Muslims to have been revealed by God to Muhammad, Prophet of Islam, is no exception. With regard to the issue of peace and violence, my contention is that the Qur'an essentially espouses a pluralist worldview, one that promotes harmony among nations and peoples. Through the centuries, however, it has been subjected to anti-pluralist, or exclusivist, interpretations in order to advance hegemonic goals, both political and religious. It is within the framework of this dichotomy between a pluralist Qur'an and anti-pluralist interpretations that we can best understand the conflicting and contradictory uses of Qur'anic texts. (I should add that my understanding of the conflict between pluralist and exclusivist strands within the Islamic tradition has been greatly influenced by Abdulaziz Sachedina's pioneering study, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism.* I am also indebted to my colleague Roy Mottahedeh, whose article "Towards an Islamic Theology of Toleration," *Islamic Law Reform and Human Rights,* ed. T. Lindholm and K. Vogt, I've found helpful.)

First, I would like to provide some sense of how I became aware of the Qur'an's teachings on pluralism. I was born and raised in Kenya, East Africa, in a devout Muslim family of South Asian ancestry. My ancestors had migrated to Africa from India more than two hundred years before. The society in which I grew up was a colonial one, under British rule. It was marked by racial and religious diversity, but also by strict racial segregation. The idiom of British imperialism in this part of Africa was racial, dividing society into three distinct classes: the European, or "white" ruling class; the Asian, or trading and clerical class (in Kenya, the term "Asian" denotes a person of South Asian ancestry); and the African, or "black" class, which mostly provided labor. Thus I grew up in an environment deeply conscious of racial differences as well as of tensions between classes. I was also keenly aware of religious diversity. Among the Asians, I knew that not all followed the same religion: there were Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, Muslims—all of whom were further divided into subgroups, such as the Arya Samaj, the Visha Oshwal, the Shia, and the Sunni. Among the Africans, there were many different tribes that spoke different languages and that were on occasion antagonistic to one another. I was also aware that some Africans were Muslims, others were Christians of various persuasions, and still others practiced what were termed "traditional African

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religions." About the Europeans I knew very little, since they kept mostly to themselves and I had no occasion to interact with them.

When I was nine or ten years old and wondering about racial and religious diversity, I asked my father, a devout Muslim, "Why didn't Allah make human beings all the same? Why did Allah make us all different?" In response, my father quoted a verse from the Qur'an: "O humankind, We [God] have created you male and female, and made you into communities and tribes, so that you may know one another. Surely the noblest amongst you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you. God is All-knowing and All-Aware" (Qur'an 49:13). This verse from the Qur'an formed the first teaching I received as a child on the subject of pluralism. Now, many years later, as I reflect on it and its meaning, I believe it is clear that from the perspective of the Qur'an, which forms the core of Islamic tradition, the divine purpose underlying human diversity is to foster knowledge and understanding, to promote harmony and cooperation among peoples. God did not create diversity as a source of tensions, divisions, and polarization in society. Indeed, whether we recognize it or not, our diversity is a sign of divine genius. The Qur'anic verse also envisages a world in which people, regardless of their differences, are united by their devotion to God. These sentiments are, in fact, echoed in another verse, in which God addresses humankind and affirms the principle of unity in diversity: "Surely this community of yours is one community, and I am your Lord; so worship me" (Qur'an 21:92). The emphasis on the universality of God's message is reflected in the Qur'an's fundamental teaching that God has revealed it to *all* peoples and to *all* cultures; not a single people or nation has been forgotten (Qur'an 35:24). Although humans may have misinterpreted that message to suit their needs in creating conflicting traditions, all religions, at their core, have sprung from the same divine source and inspiration.

The idea that God's message is universal, but its manifestations are plural, provides the basic underpinning of the manner in which the Qur'an relates itself and the faith it preaches to the religious traditions that preceded it in the Middle East, namely Judaism and Christianity. Far from denying the validity of these predecessor traditions, the Qur'an repeatedly affirms their essential truth, acknowledging that their message comes from one and the same God, and that the Qur'an is only the latest of God's revelations to affirm and confirm those that preceded it. Characteristic of this affirmative and pluralistic stance is this command to believers: "Say: we believe in God and what has been revealed to us and what was revealed to Abraham, Ismail, Isaac, Jacob, and the tribes, and in what was given to Moses, Jesus, and the prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between one and another among them and to Him [God] do we submit" (Qur'an 3:84).

Qur'anic beliefs in the truth of the Judaic and Christian traditions are

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also encapsulated in another term: the *ahl al-kitab*, or People of the Book. This is the umbrella term in the Qur'an to refer to communities, or peoples, who have received revelation in the form of scripture. It is commonly used to refer to Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The pluralistic nature of this term is evident in the use of the noun *Book* in the singular rather than the plural, to emphasize that Jews, Christians, and Muslims follow one and the same Book, not various conflicting scriptures. The Old and New Testaments and the Qur'an are seen as being plural, earthly manifestations of the one heavenly Scripture in which God has inscribed the Divine word. Significantly, the Qur'an does not claim that it abrogates the scriptures revealed before it. On the contrary, it affirms their validity. In one verse addressed to the prophet Muhammad, God advises him, "And if you [Muhammad] are in doubt concerning that which We reveal to you, then question those who read the scripture [that was revealed] before you" (Qur'an 10:94). Another verse addressed to the Muslim faithful says, "And argue not with the People of the Book unless it be in a way that is better, save with such of them as do wrong; and say we believe in that which has been revealed to us and to you; our God and your God is one and unto Him we submit" (Qur'an 29:46).

While the concept of the People of the Book was originally coined to refer to the major monotheistic traditions in the Arabian milieu, there were attempts to expand the term theologically to include other groups, such as the Zoroastrians in Iran and Hindus and Buddhists in India, as the Islamic tradition spread outside the Middle East and Muslims encountered other religious traditions. In seventeenth-century India, Dara Shikoh, a prince from the ruling Mughal dynasty who was strongly influenced by the pluralistic teachings within Islamic traditions of mysticism, considered the Hindu scriptures, the Upanishads, to be the "storehouse of monotheism" and claimed that they were the *kitab maknun*, or "hidden scripture," referred to in the Qur'an (56:77–80). He personally translated these Sanskrit texts into Persian and held that it was the duty of every faithful Muslim to read them. Admittedly, not all Muslims were comfortable with the broadening of the term "People of the Book" to include religious scriptures and traditions not mentioned specifically by name in the Qur'an, but the fact remains that these types of interpretation were made possible by the pluralistic nature of the Qur'anic worldview.

With such a universalist perspective, it goes without saying that the Qur'an does not deny the salvific value of the Judaic or the Christian traditions. Salvation, according to the Qur'an, will be granted to anyone who is a submitter to Divine Will (the literal meaning of the word *muslim*). Indeed, Islamic scripture regards Abraham, the patriarch, and all the other prophets of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, including Moses and Jesus, as being *muslim* in the true sense of the word. Typically, the third chapter of the Qur'an contains the following verses: "Some of the

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People of the Book are a nation upstanding: they recite the Signs of God all night long, and they prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in God and the Last Day; they enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and they hasten to do good works. They are in the ranks of the righteous" (Qur'an 3:113–114). Repeatedly, the Qur'an declares that on the Day of Judgment all human beings will be judged on their moral performance, irrespective of their formal religious affiliation.

The Qur'an's endorsement of religiously and culturally plural societies and the recognition of the salvific value of other monotheistic religions greatly affected the treatment of religious minorities in Muslim lands throughout history. While there have been instances when religious minorities were grudgingly tolerated in Muslim societies, rather than being respected in the true spirit of pluralism, the Qur'anic endorsement of a pluralistic ethos explains why the violent forms of anti-Semitism generated by exclusivist Christian theology in medieval and modern Europe, and the associated harsh treatment of Jewish populations that eventually culminated in the Holocaust, never occurred in regions under Muslim rule.

From the earliest periods of Muslim history, we have examples of respect for the rights of non-Muslims under Muslim rule. For instance, the fourth Caliph, Ali ibn Abi Talib (d. 661), instructed his governor in Egypt to show mercy, love, and kindness to all subjects under his rule, including non-Muslims, whom he declared to be "your equals in creation." Such tolerance is later reflected in the policies of the Arab dynasties of Spain, the Fatimids in North Africa, and the Turkish Ottomans in the Middle East, granting maximum individual and group autonomy to those adhering to a non-Islamic religious tradition. We can also cite the example of the Mughal emperor Akbar (d. 1605), who—much to the dismay of the religious right wing of his time—promoted tolerance among the various traditions that composed the Indian religious landscape.

How can a scripture that celebrates pluralism be the source of the intolerance and hatred that a few contemporary Muslim groups show toward the West? How can a scripture that declares "Let there be no compulsion in religion" be invoked by those who would forcibly impose their religious views on others, Muslim and non-Muslim alike? How can a scripture that instructs Muslims to regard the People of the Book as among the righteous be used to declare that Christians and Jews are infidels? The answers to these questions can be traced to the emergence of an unfortunate mode of Qur'anic interpretation that is exclusivist in nature.

A complex and intricately connected set of factors has given rise to this exclusivist discourse. Here I would briefly mention two: the doctrine

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of supersession and the religious legitimation of political hegemony. Supersession is the idea that Islam, as the latest of the monotheistic revelations, supersedes all revelations that preceded it. It postulates that since Islam is the successor to the Judaic and Christian traditions, it is the latest and most complete form of revelation. Moreover, since Muhammad was the last of approximately 124,000 prophets sent to humanity by God, he was therefore the bearer of God's revelation in its most perfect form. According to this doctrine, the Qur'anic revelation abrogated all preceding scriptures. As God's last revelation, the Qur'an alone had validity until the end of time. Thus the possibility of attaining salvation through religions other than Islam, if admitted at all, was at best limited.

Such exclusivist conceptions were helpful in fostering a sense of identity among adherents of a new religious community, eventually becoming an important means of forging solidarity among various Arab tribes that had previously been engaged in petty rivalries and wars. In the eighth and ninth centuries, this social and political solidarity became the backbone of the early Arab Muslim empire, for it provided an effective basis for aggression against those who did not share this solidarity with the community of believers. It is within this context that political concepts such as *dar al-islam* (territories under Muslim suzerainty) and *dar al-harb* (territories under non-Muslim control) became prominent, although they have no real basis in the Qur'an. In the same vein, the notion of *jihad* was reinterpreted to justify imperial goals. In the Arabic language, this term, which is fraught with definitional ambiguities, literally means "struggle." It was initially interpreted, at the time of the prophet Muhammad, to connote an ethical and moral struggle against an individual's base instincts, or as a defensive struggle by the early Muslims against religious persecution: "Leave is given to those who fight because they are wronged—surely God is able to help them—who were expelled from their habitations without right, except that they say 'Our Lord is God'" (Qur'an 22:39–40). "And fight [struggle] in the way of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not: God loves not the aggressors" (Qur'an 2:190). Under the influence of the political realities of later centuries that witnessed an expansion of Arab rule, what was clearly a reference in the Qur'an to a moral struggle, or an armed struggle in the face of provocation and aggression, came to be interpreted as a general military offensive against nonbelievers and as a means of legitimizing political dominion. (For more about the theological debates on the term *jihad* in early Islam, see R. Mottahedeh and R. Al-Sayyid, "The Idea of *Jihad* in Islam before the Crusades," *The Crusades from the Perspective of Byzantium and the Muslim World,* ed. A. Laiou and R. Mottahedeh [Dumbarton Oaks Center Studies, 2001].)

To be sure, the religious justification for promoting imperialist interests had to be sought in the Qur'an, the very text that forbade compul-

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sion in religious matters and contained verses of an ecumenical nature recognizing not only the authenticity of other monotheistic traditions, but the essential equality of all prophets sent by God. For this purpose, as Abdulaziz Sachedina has so ably demonstrated, several Muslim exegetes devised terminological and methodological strategies to mold the exegesis of the sacred text in order to provide a convincing prop for absolutist ends. The principal means by which the exclusivists were able to promote their view was by declaring that the many verses calling for pluralism, commanding Muslims to build bridges of understanding with non-Muslims, had been overridden by other verses that called for fighting the infidel. The verses in question were revealed after war broke out in the seventh century between the small, beleaguered Muslim community and its powerful pagan Arab, Christian, and Jewish adversaries. Typical of these verses is the following: "Then when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolators wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent and perform the prayer and pay *zakat* [the alms tax], let them go their way. Surely God is forgiving and merciful" (Qur'an 9:5). Another verse, revealed when certain Jewish and Christian groups betrayed the Muslim cause and joined in the military assault by the pagan Arabs against the prophet Muhammad and the Muslim community, cautioned against taking Jews and Christians as close political allies (Qur'an 5:51). It is only by completely disregarding the original historical contexts of revelation of such verses and using them to engage in a large-scale abrogation of contradictory verses that the exclusivist Muslim exegetes have been able to counteract the pluralist ethos that so thoroughly pervades the Qur'an.

Historically, exclusivist interpretations of the Qur'an have also been used to justify dominion over other Muslims, specifically those whose interpretation of the faith and religious practices were perceived as deviating from the norms espoused by exclusivists. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for instance, several areas of the Muslim world witnessed the rise of movements that, in response to what was perceived as a general moral decline, attempted to "purify" Islam. The leaders of those movements targeted a range of practices and beliefs among fellow Muslims that, in their eyes, constituted evidence of religious backsliding. In particular, Sufi forms of Islam were attacked as not deriving from "authentic" Islam. In certain cases, the attacks took on a military character, and *jihads* were launched against fellow Muslims with the intention of forcibly imposing upon them those interpretations favored by the exclusivists.

The most dramatic and influential of these movements was the so-called Wahhabi movement in Arabia. Named after the reformer Abd al-

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Wahhab, who died in 1791, this puritanical movement acquired an explosive energy after its founder allied himself with a petty Arab chieftain, Muhammad Ibn Saud. Abd al-Wahhab was influenced in his thought by the writings of a controversial fourteenth-century thinker, Ibn Taiymiyyah, whose exclusivist and literalist interpretations of the Qur'an led him to declare that the descendants of the Mongols were infidels, notwithstanding their public profession of belief in Islam. To propagate their particular brand of Islam, the Wahhabis attacked fellow Muslims, whose practices they considered "un-Islamic." Targeting in particular popular expressions of Sufi practice as well as Shii Muslims, the Wahhabis steadily expanded their power over central and western Arabia until they were able to effect the political unification of the peninsula into the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Once established, the Wahhabi authorities instituted a religious police force, which, among its other functions, compels Muslims to perform ritual prayer at appropriate times of the day, in direct contradiction of the Qur'an's commandment, "Let there be no compulsion in religion." Not surprisingly, this movement considered Jews and Christians to be infidels. To this day, Saudi Arabia's state version of Islam is founded on an exclusivist interpretation of the Qur'an, intolerant of both interreligious and intrareligious plurality. Bankrolled by millions of petrodollars, the Saudis' exclusivist interpretation of Islam has been exported all over the Muslim world, much to the dismay of the pluralists.

In recent times, exclusivist views have also been heavily promoted by so-called fundamentalist groups in the Muslim world. (Though I recognize that the term *fundamentalist* is not an academically accurate term to describe these groups, I use it here because of its broad acceptance in popular discourse.) The reasons for the rise of such groups are complex. Broadly speaking, these movements are a reaction against modernity, Westernization, economic deprivation, global domination by Western powers (particularly the United States), and support by such powers for repressive regimes in predominantly Muslim lands. The failure of borrowed ideologies, such as capitalism, communism, or socialism, to deliver economic and social justice in many Muslim countries has created exclusivist groups seeking a "pure" and "authentic" language in which to criticize the failed modern Muslim state, a state that has marginalized, or displaced, traditional religious authorities in a bid to maximize political power. The search for a solution to the myriad political, social, and economic problems confronting Muslims has led these exclusivist groups to use Islam as a political ideology for the state: "Islam is the solution." The commitment of such groups to understand Islam in a "pure" monolithic form, to engage in revisionist history, and to read religious texts in an exclusivist manner that denies any plurality of interpretations, has unleashed a struggle in the Muslim world between the members of such movements and those who uphold the pluralist teachings of the Qur'an.

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An important dimension of the struggle between the exclusivists and the pluralists is the debate over the role and status of women in Muslim societies, for exclusivists tend to be anti-egalitarian in their interpretations of gender roles.

For Muslims to participate in the multireligious and multicultural world of the twenty-first century, it is essential that they fully embrace Qur'anic teachings on pluralism. Exclusivist interpretations of the Qur'an that are premised on the hegemony of Islam over non-Islam and that employ a rhetoric of hate and violence to attain such goals are outdated in a global society in which relations between different peoples are best fostered on the basis of equality and mutual respect—a basic principle underlying the Qur'anic worldview. Since in several key Muslim nations the exclusivist message has been propagated by *madrasas*, or religious schools, sponsored by exclusivist groups or by the state itself, a key to the outcome of the struggle between pluralism and exclusivism in the Islamic tradition lies in the re-education of Muslim peoples about the pluralism that lies at the heart of the Qur'an. Without this pluralist education, they will continue to rely on the monolithic interpretations of scholars and demagogues to access the Qur'an. Only by raising levels of religious literacy in the Islamic world will Muslims become aware of the centrality of Qur'anic teachings concerning religious and cultural pluralism as a divinely ordained principle of coexistence among human societies.

As a pluralist Muslim who is American, I am struck by the resonance between the pluralism espoused in the Qur'an and that in the constitution and civic culture of the United States. Contrary to what some may claim, one can be fully American and fully Muslim simultaneously. Although it is true that there are certain American foreign policies relating to Muslim peoples and nations—including partisanship for illiberal Israeli policies and support for an intolerant Saudi state, as well as for exclusivist Muslim groups—that I believe call for critical inquiry and reappraisal, I also believe that my questioning of these U.S. policies must be coupled with my challenging of intolerant and textually dubious exclusivist interpretations within my religious tradition. In the end, a struggle against the flaws of the "other"—whether that other is "the West" or "Islam"—is worthwhile only if it is joined with a struggle (*jihad*) against the flaws within one's own traditions. In the necessary work of struggling against such errors, one should not lose sight of how much there is to be proud of in those traditions. As one who is proud both of Islam and of my adopted country, and is inspired by the consonance of their pluralism, I close with words from the Qur'an that also resonate in the American collective consciousness: "In God We Trust" (Qur'an 7: 89).

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Grace, Punishment, and the Torah

JONATHAN ROSEN

"Vengeance is mine," saith the Lord. But what about the rest of us? In the aftermath of September 11th, some people have voiced the concern that American troops overseas are there primarily to take revenge. I confess that this has surprised me; if someone comes to kill you, Jewish law permits killing him first. This is not revenge before the fact, it is self-defense. My view of our war on terrorism reflects this conviction: we are fighting to prevent future attacks. That said, the charge of vengeance did get me thinking about Jewish attitudes toward retribution, in part because, in the placards of anti-war protesters that declared "An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind," I could not help seeing a finger pointed at Judaism, often depicted as a punitive faith presided over by an angry God.

According to the rabbis of the Talmud, whoever forgoes retaliation has his sins remitted. The Bible itself is quite clear that revenge is a bad thing. Leviticus 19:18 decrees: "Thou shalt not take revenge or bear a grudge." This is not the same as saying that the *desire* for revenge is a bad thing. I've always been impressed that the beautiful and haunting Psalm 137, which begins with the exiled Israelites weeping by the rivers of Babylon, ends abruptly with a line addressed to Babylonian women: "happy is he who shall seize and dash thy little ones against the rock." Perhaps anything else, coming from people who had just seen their city and Temple burned, their women raped, their children skewered, and their men carried off into slavery, would be a lie. I've always taken that last line as a sign of mental health, as befits a people who found the practice of taking revenge abhorrent.

But in Judaism, revenge is not particularly important. Justice is. That is at the heart of the notion of "an eye for an eye," which was a way of making sure the punishment was not disproportionate to the crime, a way of preventing revenge, a way of guarding against arbitrary retribution

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inflicted by enraged parties. It formalized punishment so that, as Leviticus states, "you shall have one manner of law" (Lev. xxiv.22).

The rabbis of the Talmud carried this notion even further by insisting that an eye for an eye is a metaphor and not a handbook for actual retribution. This is a perfect example of the way in which Pharisaic thinking is the opposite of what people often believe it is. The rabbis used literal-mindedness as a way to transcend the literal nature of the law, not to enforce it:

> "Eye for eye" (exod. xxi 24)—that means a payment of the money. You say that it means payment of money; but perhaps the intention is that the actual eye must be forfeited! Supposing, however, that the eye of the one was large and of the other small, how can I in that case apply the Scriptural dictum "eye for eye"? . . . Or supposing a blind man had knocked out the eye of another, or a man with an amputated arm had cut off the arm of another, or a lame man had made another lame, how can I fulfill in this case "eye for eye" (B.K. 83b and following)?

For the rabbis the conclusion was obvious—it wasn't physical punishment but an assessment of damages translated into monetary value that would ensure justice. Anything else, according to the rabbis, would violate the admonishment in Leviticus that justice should be uniformly applied.

How ironic it is, then, to see those protestors' placards, since the eye-for-an-eye-leaves-the-whole-world-blind argument is precisely the one the rabbis used in determining that the verse must mean something beyond physical punishment. They did this a long time ago, and the letter and spirit of their interpretation has been part of mainstream Judaism for more than fifteen hundred years. And yet somehow the blind rigor that people identify with that sentence—seen as a quintessential instance of unforgiving "Old Testament" thinking—has attached itself to a mistaken notion of Jewish justice.

This was sadly evident in a recent *Time* magazine article by Karen Armstrong, defending Islam in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks. Ms. Armstrong wrote:

> The Koran quotes the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, which permits people to retaliate eye for eye, tooth for tooth, but like the gospels, the Koran suggests that it is meritorious to forgo revenge in a spirit of charity.

In the word "but" there is a world of dangerous misunderstanding and a whiff of ancient calumny. For "retaliation" there is the Hebrew scripture—but for the charitable renunciation of revenge there are the gospels.

Judaism and revenge are a touchy combination, in part thanks to Shakespeare's Shylock, who includes the need to avenge himself as part

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of what makes him human: "If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?" It is ultimately only revenge that Shylock wants, the bloodthirsty execution of his enemy, in contrast to the rule imposed by Portia, who mingles justice and mercy. In the play, and in much of the Christian imagination, it is the Jew who shouts for the literal fulfillment of a law that will carve itself into the body of another human being. This is, in fact, the opposite of Jewish justice, which declares that "The attribute of grace exceeds that of punishment [i.e., justice] by five-hundredfold." Revenge tragedy—where the failure to kill leads to agonizing guilt, and the fulfillment of responsibility means drowning pity in a river of blood—was not a Jewish genre.

The rabbis were so concerned with merciful justice that they imagined God himself praying that his mercy be greater than his justice. His full prayer is described this way: "May it be My will that My mercy may subdue My wrath; and may My mercy prevail over My attribute of justice, so that I may deal with My children in the quality of mercy and enter on their behalf within the line of strict justice" (Ber. 7a).

A related passage describes God's day as follows: "During three hours of each day He sits and judges the whole world. When He sees that the world is deserving of being destroyed because of the prevalent evil, he arises from the throne of justice and sits upon the throne of mercy" (A.Z. 3b). This serves as a model for human behavior.

But religions cannot be summarized by the quotation of verses. What matters is how a religion interprets, through action, the words its scriptures contain. The rabbis could always find two interpretations for every verse. It's how the verse is lived that determines the tenor of the faith. There are myriad rabbinic laws for putting sinners to death, but the rabbis tell us that a Sanhedrin—a tribunal of Temple times—that put an offender to death once every seven years was known as a "bloody Sanhedrin" (Makkot 7a).

Having said as much, I should quickly add that the rabbis understood that failing to take action when it is required would constitute its own form of immorality. In the matter of war, for example, they felt that even the Sabbath could be broken, since war is a matter of life and death. And just two verses before we are told not to bear a grudge, Leviticus declares, "you shall not stand idly by the blood of your brother." This has nothing to do with revenge. It is, rather, a matter of justice.

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The Lesson of Antietam

JAMES M. McPHERSON

Our recent losses seem almost immeasurable, yet another cataclysmic September day—September 17, 1862—remains the bloodiest in American history. In the Battle of Antietam, six thousand soldiers were killed outright or mortally wounded. Sixteen thousand more were wounded and survived, though many would live out their days missing an arm or a leg. And the Civil War would continue for two and a half years. At least 620,000 Americans lost their lives in that tragic conflict—2 percent of the nation's population at the time. If 2 percent of the American people were to die in a war fought today, the number would approach six million.

In 1862, as today, Americans sought an explanation for such terrible carnage. What could justify the bloodletting of the battle of Antietam? In retrospect, we know that it provided President Abraham Lincoln with the occasion to announce his Emancipation Proclamation, a crucial step in the process by which four million slaves achieved freedom, and the institution of slavery, which had divided and disgraced America, was abolished forever. The battle of Antietam also proved a critical turning point toward ultimate Union victory in the Civil War: a victory that preserved the United States as one nation, indivisible.

But that victory did more than preserve a united nation. It kept alive the vision of a democratic political order and a republican form of government. That vision itself was on trial in the Civil War. The United States stood almost alone in the mid-nineteenth century as a democratic republic in a world bestrode by kings, queens, princes, emperors, czars, petty dictators, and theories of aristocracy. Despite the anomaly of slavery in this boasted land of liberty, champions of human rights in other lands looked to the United States, in the words of one of them, as a "beacon of

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freedom whose radiance will light the whole world to triumph over the dark fiends of despotism, vice and wretchedness."

Secession and civil war threatened to darken this beacon. The forces of reaction in Europe responded with expressions of smug satisfaction at the "immortal smash" of the now dis-United States as proof of what one British aristocrat called "the failure of republican institutions in time of pressure." In 1862, during a dark period for the Union cause before the battle of Antietam, the conservative British leader Benjamin Disraeli stated his belief that the United States could never be cobbled together again, and that the nation of the future would be "an America of rival states and maneuvering Cabinets, of frequent turbulence, and of frequent war."

But at that time of discouragement, President Lincoln declared his intention "to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or Congress and the country forsake me." He did maintain the contest until successful, but he also died at the very moment of success. It was left for an Englishman to spell out the consequences of that success. Edward Beesly was a liberal political economist at University College in London, a champion of greater democracy in Britain and a supporter of the Union cause in the American Civil War. In 1865, after Appomattox, he declared that "our opponents told us that republicanism was on trial" in the Civil War. "They insisted on our watching what they called its breakdown. They told us that it was forever discredited in England. Well, we accepted the challenge. We staked our hopes boldly on the result. Under a strain such as no aristocracy, no monarchy, no empire could have supported, republican institutions have stood firm." The sacrifice of six thousand lives at Antietam thus had meaning. American institutions stood firm in the face of that extreme trial, giving encouragement that they will do so again.

Our national trauma will take a long time to heal. The resilience of our institutions and our society are being sorely tried. But they have been tried before and have survived, indeed have emerged from the trauma stronger and better. We must also remember that half of those who died at Antietam fought for the Confederacy. In the spirit of Lincoln's second inaugural address, delivered at the moment of imminent victory, let us forswear malice even as we as a nation go forward—"with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us . . . bind up the nation's wounds and do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations."

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The Global Century

SHASHI THAROOR

On September 11, 2001, the twenty-first century was born. Remember all the disputes about whether the new millennium actually began on January 1, 2000, on January 1, 2001? Of course either date would have been an arbitrary choice, tracing human evolution from the unreliably recorded birthday of a great Jewish pacifist. But neither marked anything more significant than the flipping of four numbers on a calendar. September 11, 2001, however, marked a different sort of watershed. If, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm has suggested, the twentieth century really began with the assassination in Sarajevo that sparked the First World War, it is fair to suggest that, judged by the impact it is likely to have on the shape of the decades to follow, the twenty-first century began with the demolition of the World Trade Center.

The terrorists who struck Manhattan on September 11 took more than 3,400 lives. More, they destroyed a powerful symbol of America: the tallest buildings in the richest city in the most powerful nation on earth. The twin towers of the World Trade Center housed many major institutions of global capitalism, from finance-management companies to insurance firms, from telecommunications transmitters to an opulent restaurant with an unmatched view of the microworld below. The destruction of the World Trade Center struck a blow not only at those institutions but also at the self-confidence that undergirded them, the self-confidence of a social and political system that, without needing to think about it too much, seemed to believe it had found the answers to life's challenges and had pretty much conquered them all. The outrage of September 11 brought the stark consciousness of physical vulnerability to a land that, despite fighting a dozen major wars in its history, had not endured an assault on its own soil in 187 years. (The last direct hit by an enemy on the continental United States, as historians dutifully reminded us, was the burning of Washington by the British in 1814.) If only by bringing home

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to Americans the end of their insulation from the history and geography that bedeviled the rest of the globe, September 11 changed the world forever.

But the horrifying events of that one day are emblematic of our new century in more ways than one. The defining features of today's world are the relentless forces of globalization, the ease of communications and travel, the shrinking of boundaries, the flow of people of all nationalities and colors across the world, the swift pulsing of financial transactions with the press of a button. The plane, the cell phone, the computer are the symbols of our time. These inventions, which in a more benign moment might have been seen as helping drive the world toward progress and prosperity, are the forces used by the terrorists in their macabre dance of death and destruction. The attackers crossed frontiers easily, coordinated their efforts with technological precision, hijacked planes and crashed them into their targets (as their doomed victims used cell phones to make last-minute calls to loved ones). This was a twenty-first-century crime, and it has defined the dangers and the potential of our time as nothing else can.

It has also provoked a reaction in the United States that will, in turn, leave an indelible mark on the new century. The twentieth century was famously dubbed, by *Time* magazine's Henry Luce, as "the American century," but the twenty-first begins with the United States in a state of global economic, political, cultural, and military dominance far greater than any world power has ever enjoyed. Washington had been curiously ambivalent about its exercise of that dominance, with many influential figures speaking and acting as if the rest of the planet was irrelevant to America's existence or to its fabled pursuit of happiness. After September 11, there could be no easy retreat into isolationism, no comfort in the illusion that the problems of the rest of the world need not trouble the United States. Americans now understand viscerally the old cliché of the global village. A fire that starts in a remote thatched hut or dusty tent in one corner of that village can melt the steel girders of the tallest skyscrapers at the other end.

This means that the twenty-first century will be the century of "one world" as never before, with a consciousness that the tragedies of our time are all global in origin and reach, and that tackling them is also a global responsibility that must be assumed by us all. Interdependence is now the watchword. The terrorist attack was an assault not just on one city but, in its callous indifference to the lives of innocents from eighty countries around the world, an assault on the very bonds of humanity that tie us all together. To respond to it effectively we must be united, and out of the solidarity that the world has demonstrated with the victims of this horror, a unity may emerge across borders that will also mark the new century as different from the ones that preceded it.

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Terrorism emerges from blind hatred of an Other, and that in turn is the product of three factors: fear, rage, and incomprehension. Fear of what the Other might do to you, rage at what you believe the Other has done to you, and incomprehension about who or what the Other really is —these three elements fuse together to ignite the deadly combustion that kills and destroys people whose only sin is that they feel none of these things themselves. If terrorism is to be tackled and ended, we will have to deal with each of these three factors by attacking the ignorance that sustains them. We will have to learn to see ourselves as others see us, learn to recognize hatred and deal with its causes, learn to dispel fear, and, above all, simply learn about each other. As this lesson is absorbed and applied, the twenty-first century could yet become a time of mutual understanding such as we have never seen before. A world in which it is easier than ever before to meet strangers must also become a world in which it is easier than ever before to see strangers as no different from ourselves.

The terrorists failed to see their victims that way: they saw only objects, dispensable pawns in their drive for destruction. Our only effective answer to them must be a defiant assertion of our own humanity: to say that each one of us, whoever we are and wherever we are, has the right to live, to love, to hope, to dream, and to aspire to a world in which everyone has that right. A world in which the scourge of terrorism is fought—but so also are the scourges of poverty, of famine, of illiteracy, of ill health, of injustice, and of human insecurity. A world, in other words, in which terror will have no chance to flourish. That could be the world of the twenty-first century that has just been born, and it could be the most hopeful legacy of the horror that has given it birth.

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Leap

BRIAN DOYLE

A couple leaped from the south tower, hand in hand. They reached for each other and their hands met and they jumped. Jennifer Brickhouse saw them falling, hand in hand.

Many people jumped. Perhaps hundreds. No one knows. They struck the pavement with such force that there was a pink mist in the air.

The mayor reported the mist.

A kindergarten boy who saw people falling in flames told his teacher that the birds were on fire. She ran with him on her shoulders out of the ashes.

Tiffany Keeling saw fireballs falling that she later realized were people. Jennifer Griffin saw people falling and wept as she told the story. Niko Winstral saw people free-falling backwards with their hands out, as if they were parachuting. Joe Duncan on his roof on Duane Street looked up and saw people jumping. Henry Weintraub saw people "leaping as they flew out." John Carson saw six people fall, "falling over themselves, falling, they were somersaulting." Steve Miller saw people jumping from a thousand feet in the air. Kirk Kjeldsen saw people flailing on the way down, people lining up and jumping, "too many people falling." Jane Tedder saw people leaping and the sight haunts her at night. Steve Tamas counted fourteen people jumping and then he stopped counting. Stuart DeHann saw one woman's dress billowing as she fell, and he saw a shirtless man falling end over end, and he too saw the couple leaping hand in hand.

Several pedestrians were killed by people falling from the sky. A fireman was killed by a body falling from the sky.

But he reached for her hand and she reached for his hand and they leaped out the window holding hands.

The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, wrote John the Apostle, *and the elements shall*

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melt with a fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

I try to whisper prayers for the sudden dead and the harrowed families of the dead and the screaming souls of the murderers but I keep coming back to his hand and her hand nestled in each other with such extraordinary ordinary succinct ancient naked stunning perfect simple ferocious love.

There is no fear in love, wrote John, *but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment.*

Their hands reaching and joining are the most powerful prayer I can imagine, the most eloquent, the most graceful. It is everything that we are capable of against horror and loss and death. It is what makes me believe that we are not craven fools and charlatans to believe in God, to believe that human beings have greatness and holiness within them like seeds that open only under great fires, to believe that some unimaginable essence of who we are persists past the dissolution of what we were, to believe against such evil hourly evidence that love is why we are here.

Their passing away was thought an affliction, and their going forth from us utter destruction, says the Book of Wisdom, *but they are in peace. They shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble.*

No one knows who they were: husband and wife, lovers, dear friends, colleagues, strangers thrown together at the window there at the lip of hell. Maybe they didn't even reach for each other consciously, maybe it was instinctive, a reflex, as they both decided at the same time to take two running steps and jump out the shattered window, but they did reach for each other, and they held on tight, and leaped, and fell endlessly into the smoking canyon, at two hundred miles an hour, falling so far and so fast that they would have blacked out before they hit the pavement near Liberty Street so hard that there was a pink mist in the air.

I trust I shall shortly see thee, John wrote, *and we shall speak face to face.*

Jennifer Brickhouse saw them holding hands, and Stuart DeHann saw them holding hands, and I hold on to that.

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After September

MARY JO SALTER

Evening, four weeks later.
The next jet from the nearby Air Force base
repeats its shuddering exercise
closer and closer overhead.
A full moon lifts again in the fragile sky,
minute by minute taking on
light from the grounded sun, until
it's bright enough to read the reported
facts of this morning's paper by—
finally, a moon that glows
so brilliantly it might persuade us
that out there *somebody knows.*

A comfort once—the omniscience
of Mother, Father, TV, moon.
Later, in the long afternoon
of adolescence, I lay on the grass
and philosophized with a friend:
would we choose to learn our death-date
(some eighty years from now, of course)?
Did it exist yet? And if so,
did we believe in fate?
(What *we* thought: to the growing
narcissist, that was the thing to know.)
Above our heads, the clouds kept drifting,
uncountable, unrecountable,
like a dreamer's game of chess
in which, it seemed, one hand alone
moved all the pieces, all of them white,
and in the hand they changed

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liquidly and at once into
shapes we almost—no,
we couldn't name.

But if there were one force
greater than we, had I ever really
doubted that he or she
or it would be literate?
Would see into the world's own heart?
To know all is to forgive all
(now, where had I read that?).
Evil would be the opposite, yes?—
scattershot and obtuse:
what hates you, what you hate
hidden in cockpits, caves, motel rooms;
too many of them to love
or anyway, too late.
By now I've raided thousands
of stories in the paper for
thinkable categories:
unlettered schoolboys with one Book
learned by heresy and hearsay;
girls never sent to school;
men's eyes fixed on the cause;
living women draped in shrouds,
eyes behind prison-grilles of gauze.

Mine, behind reading-glasses
(updated yearly, to lend no greater
clarity than the illusion
that one can stay in place),

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look up and guess what the moon
means by its blurred expression.
Something to do with grief,
that grief now seems old-fashioned—
a gesture that the past
gave the past for being lost—
and that the future is newly lost
to an unfocused dread
of what may never happen
and nobody can stop.

Not tired yet, wound-up, almost
too glad to be alive—as if
this too were dangerous—
I imagine the synchronized operations
across the neighborhood:
putting the children to bed;
laying out clean clothes;
checking that the clock-radio
is set for six o'clock tomorrow,
to alarm ourselves with news.

Mary Jo Salter, Emily Dickinson Senior Lecturer in the Humanities at Mount Holyoke College, is the author of four books of poems, most recently *A Kiss in Space*.

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Belief

NIKIA LEOPOLD

The Christmas tree, grown to be cut,
tilts in its bucket,
untrimmed, drawing water
through the stub of trunk.
Each time I go in the kitchen
I'm surprised by its fragrance—
its silent breath—am reminded
that breathing is steady luck,
a constant surprise,
and that I too stand between
floor and ceiling, cut
from belief in anything but
the presence of dark boughs
and the hope of something gleaming.

Nikia Leopold writes and illustrates children's books, the most recent of which is *Once I Was . . . .* Her work has appeared several times in the SCHOLAR.

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Teacher

Eleven Notes

LIONEL BASNEY

I

I have been a teacher for almost thirty years without having intended to be one. I suspect this is true of many of us. The postwar explosion of American schools—and their consolidation into a uniform, specialized institution, an industry—sucked up into the academy most of the other forms of high culture and their practitioners. People who hoped to be writers, painters, composers, performers, critics, and cultural journalists have ended up as teachers first and something else second. Or third: to be a teacher now means being a committeeperson, an academic politician, a conference goer, an administrator, a grant winner, a counselor. You'll be lucky if you paint a few weeks a year.

And you'll be lucky if it isn't academic painting, or painting enslaved by your rebellion against academic painting: "We are but critics, or but half create, / Timid, entangled, empty and abashed." Our residence in schools pays us something and costs us something. Everything in a school must be made scholastic. Thinking is pied into disciplines; teaching withers to the transfer of disciplinary methods. Painters talk about the theory of paint. Poets found journals to host theories of poetry; the theory comes back on the poetry and separates it from common speech. This is called the reflexivity of postmodern culture. In truth, it is the academy talking to itself. Art never confronts its only real criteria, the moral and narrative needs of practical life.

Which are dealt with, in the academy as in society as a whole, as matters of technique and money, whose criteria are feasibility and profit.

Lionel Basney died in a drowning accident in August 1999. He was fifty-two and had been a professor of English at Calvin College, in Grand Rapids, Michigan, for fourteen years. His "Immanuel's Ground," published in the Summer 1999 issue, received that year's AMERICAN SCHOLAR Award for Best Essay. His wife found "Teacher: Eleven Notes" among his papers several months after his death.

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In academicizing art and commercializing the academy, we have had the support of society at large; we have had the urging, almost the demand, of the government. The humanities, Paul Goodman wrote, "cannot be taught in colleges at all," for there are no "veterans" of their practice—and this is because "free and learned thought is simply not a social force among us," "the very notion of a nonacademic practice of history, philosophy, or humane letters [having] nearly vanished." Goodman wrote this in 1962; but he would have been equally right to say it of 1952 or 1942. Looking back, I have no idea, really, what the boundary date should be—only that we have been living under present conditions for so long that no practicing academic can remember anything different. Goodman himself represented the "public intellectuals" who appear on occasion and in special circumstances; but he was right to imply that such writers represent no established "practice" in society as a whole.

I had been a teacher for a long time when I went to a party at a distinguished private university and was called sharply to my senses. The talk was exclusively of package tours to cultural places, of programs accessed, of contracts angled for and jobs neatly wangled, of the food at the faculty club. It's possible that someone at some point mentioned a poem, to have others fumble for the title and not know it. The intellectual oxygen in the room wouldn't have sustained a match. I left early and came back to the farm. But I felt shaken and impatient for days.

2

Now, as the end of my career comes into view, I have started to weed out my files. They are full of weeds: repetitious copies of old syllabi and examinations, lecture notes, the material I have banked up against the passing of the semesters. I have told myself there would be something useful here, an idea or a phrase I might use in a serious way, when I had time. But I am embarrassed to read most of it, especially the syllabi. They strike me now as mannered, abrupt, and condescending. I suppose the mannerism was meant to be charming; the abruptness, concise and businesslike; the condescension, a challenge to student complacency. This is what I hope was true. I almost remember it that way.

I know teachers who have all their grade books lined up on a shelf, uniformly green, spiral-bound, each class, student, and grade inked into its box in the grid. The grade book is like an ore survey or a savings book, and there is a new book every year, twenty-five or thirty of them: the shelf is a monument.

I have never bothered with attendance. My theory has been that if my students found I was not helping them by what I said, they ought by rights to stay away. My grades have been recorded, in a numerical shorthand of

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my own device, on ordinary typing paper, on yellow legal sheets, and on the backs of memos.

I have never kept formal memorabilia and wonder now if this was a mistake. I think not. It would have been very hard for me, temperamentally, to collect such things, and therefore probably wrong to require it of myself. I wonder if, when I am eighty, I will wish I had letters of commendation, plaques, citations, photos, yearbooks, and commemorative pens. I won't have them, however, and that is that.

I do have a collection of random souvenirs that have accumulated more from a failure to purge them than from a decision to keep them. I have a matchbox of thorns given me when I taught the English romantics and remarked that "I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!" always struck me as comic. I have a small ceramic groundhog given me by a young man because I was his only teacher to know where Punxsutawney was (or how to spell it). I have an old bullet clip made during World War I for one of its standard rifles. I have a poster of heavy corrugated cardboard, handdrawn for someone else in my first or second year of teaching. It reads, "An apple a day is pretty cheap pay." It is yellowed and stands warping on the baseboard heater.

I have a small wooden box with plastic windows and three papered rollers behind them—month, date, day. It has not recorded the correct day or date for twenty-five years, except when one of my daughters would fix it, with a sigh of exasperation, after which it would be correct for one day. No one registers dates in this job. It is important only that it is Tuesday or Wednesday, or even that it is Shakespeare day, and that you have glanced at *Antony and Cleopatra* again before you head down the hall.

3

I have begun to give away my books. Of course the shelves have always been in a slow flux. Publishers send samples, which I have routinely given away in preference to selling them to bootleg distributors. (Now the publishers print "Examination Copy" and "Not for Sale" in ribbons of color, like oriflammes, across the covers.) But I am beginning to give away books I once chose to acquire.

The odd thing is that, as I stand before the shelves, facing the jury, the covers that draw my eyes are the faded paperbacks I bought as an undergraduate. These are the ones I suspect I will be keeping. Not out of nostalgia: my schooling left none behind it. The impulse, I believe, is more that when you have only a little money and are just starting to read—when you know almost nothing, and know *that*—you buy Plato, Augustine, Nietzsche, Thoreau, the names you hear talked about. You don't buy *Existentializing the Asymptote: Bureaucracy and Hermaphroditism in*

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the Late Works of. . . . (You see how it is impossible even to parody these titles.) It doesn't occur to you that you might buy such things. They are books for libraries, and anyhow they are too expensive. You buy Lao Tzu, *Purgatorio, Heart of Darkness*, Yeats, Proust, Woolf.

I have claimed for years that the only books worth reading with a class are ones you can carry to class in your pocket. These are the ones becoming visible again. I feel some apprehension about this. These books may be a jury, but not a jury of my peers. They seem to call me to account, and I doubt that I can give an account. One thing university monographs can be used for is protection from writers like Plato, the ones as serious as Bach and Goya. But sooner or later you get tired of weaseling, I think. There seems to be health in sitting down again to read, "Near the end of March, 1845, I borrowed an axe. . . ."

Stanley Cavell is the only writer on Thoreau who realizes that *Walden* was a new scripture. The notion is oxymoronic. You can't really have a new scripture any more than you can have an ex-king or a former saint. What the oxymoron shows is the gravity of the demand placed on narrative, on sentences, finally on words, by Thoreau's notion of economy. To economize is to live a spartan life and to give an account of it. An account timely and exacting enough economizes on the pause between deed and word, until the word becomes the deed. The demand is almost intolerable: every word a real-time act of conscience. In *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers,* Thoreau could not live up to his own demand and was driven to go on, obsessively, unforgivably, hacking at his sentences in an effort to make an ideal, like friendship, clear enough to hazard himself on. By the time he wrote *Walden,* he had learned how to meet the demand with aphorism, which turns the demand aside and fulfills it by suggestion—that is, by transferring it to us. And Thoreau had learned to trust nature, which does not account for itself and need not. How much silence there is in *Walden*! Thoreau doesn't have to hurry. He won't miss the mail. *His axe is at the foot of the tree.*

But most of my books are nothing like *Walden,* of course, and I regret having bought them. They were expensive, profitless, and distracting. I bought many in fits of identification with the academy, which I hoped would become a home for me. But I have given up this aspiration. I have put my axe to a modest tree.

4

How students dress. Not long ago I told a class that their clothes constituted a uniform. It wasn't a substantive observation, just an illustration in passing, so I was surprised when a girl to my left broke out, interrupting me, angry, "No. I'd have to disagree with that."

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Have to. I half-consciously registered the odd force of her words, but I answered just by looking demonstratively around the room, trusting that she and the others would see what I saw: every student except one was wearing light blue denim jeans and a sweatshirt and some brand of hiking boot. (It was perfectly pragmatic clothing: this was January in Michigan.) The only exceptions were one pair of black denims and one pair of economy low-top sneakers.

After looking around the circle, I said, "Well . . . ," hoping, expecting really, that the moment had answered the question, at least in terms of data—now we had all seen the same thing—and that I could ask where the demurral had come from and what it meant. But the girl was firm, glaring at me. (Directing my attention around the circle, I'm not sure whether she had followed my glance.) She had a cap of short red hair and eyes set too close, so that she seemed to be always frowning with anger or anxiety. She had metal beads tracking the edges of her ears and a metal stud in her tongue. For her, my demonstration had answered nothing.

So I said, "Well, everyone has jeans on. . . ."

"But that doesn't mean we're dressed the same way," she broke in again. "I mean, Ray isn't dressed like the rest of us."

"But he's the only one of you *not* wearing boots," I said.

"I still don't see why you think we're dressed the same," came the angry insistence again. I thought, "Because you are," but I had already fallen through the ice of lucid discourse and was floundering. I could have dismissed the day's topic and focused on her anger. But I don't go in for classroom humiliations or public therapy, and no one else, not even Ray, seemed to be interested.

Why was she angry? What were we talking about? Was it that I had bent the students' attention back on themselves? Was it that my look, which I had meant to be frank and open, seemed arrogant and objectifying? Was she angry because she had to be there at all? Then she wasn't angry at *me.* I suspect we were perturbed by the same fact, how the market in clothes (as in food and ideas) furnishes us all virtually identically, and how intense a denial of human particularity this entails.

The truth is I wear a uniform myself—khakis, flannel shirt—and so whatever experimentation occurs is carried out by students. One day (another class, another semester) the sweatshirt arrived with a long pleated skirt and granny boots, and a thick cable-knit cap of unbleached wool. The student being male, the effect was monastic, Tibetan. Just eccentricity, as it turned out.

This is Michigan, as I have said, but they wear their heavy down jackets open in front, with the sleeves slid down over their hands. It is as if they were insisting on powerlessness, miming having no hands or arms, only wings.

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Here are a short skirt, black stockings, and high heels teetering through the slush in the parking lot. This is perhaps just a miscalculation on its way to an audition. One day I watched a black cocktail dress, long earrings touching the elegant neck, and a two-handed tub of Mountain Dew.

You can't disguise the necks or make them any less childlike—and there, also, the ponytails and pigtails and the tiny braids as delicate as caterpillars.

5

The basic equipment for a classroom teacher is the same as for a stand-up comedian: a striking voice, a direct gaze, and the inner freedom to say more or less anything that comes to mind. Also useful is a thick mental deposit of miscellaneous information: anecdotes, publication dates and other historical clutter, phrases from songs, the names and saleable features of recent movie figures all stick involuntarily in my mind and are subject to random, improvisatory recall.

What you do with this equipment depends, of course, on whether you can remain intellectually and emotionally open, vital. Since the time I took the required degrees and was, in this way, licensed to practice, I have read a great deal, partly because I love the English language and the things made of it, and partly because the habit of formal discourse was implanted in me very young. Criticism has flavors as poetry does. But I doubt if a large body of systematic knowledge is of much use to a teacher of undergraduates. Which means that much of our formal professional training is beside the point. Changes of critical or pedagogical method provide topics for conferences, but I doubt if students are cumulatively much better (or worse) readers and writers than they ever were.

That isn't what's going on in the classroom.

What's going on is partly waiting. You talk with and to students, waiting for the moment of intellectual shock, or fear, or (more rarely) love, that means something has found its way in, or been allowed in, though the significance of this is the student's to state and may not be evident for years. This is, mind you, *intellectual* fear or love—but the exact relation or interchange between thought and feeling is impossible to state. There is a decorum here. The classroom is not a therapy session, and I have no use for those who turn it into one—or into a professedly egalitarian market of personal (usually sexual) relations—and then prey on people.

Yet *there are people present:* a complicated hermeneutic, private and public, is being carried on, in which the text you are discussing is only a knot, or an occasion. And the results of the hermeneutic practice are always in code.

I lecture and overhear myself. Some of what I say is foreknown, pre-

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owned, cadged at random. Some is exploratory: I'm looking for, looking out for, a sharper phrase for the notion at hand. Some of what I say has no intellectual purpose but is simply to punctuate the time, to let us relax. I tell a story, or note something I saw on the way to class and reflect on it for a moment, or pause at a pun that has cropped up, or clown about the administration's hidden microphone and greet the dean, loudly, into the radiator.

And this lecturing, this line, this snake oil, has to do with my own psychological continuity and security as well as with *Lear* or the construction of paragraphs. I am one of the people present—and in sharper need than the students because I am older and have fewer options. (Odd that the pretense should be that I can offer *them* options.) The forward momentum of my speech is running one story above the more complicated back-and-forth movement of my colloquy with myself (and the same is true of their listening), I am coping with the powerful reality of these young humans in the room with me, I am trying to cope with the increasing embarrassment of encountering my own limitations. It is an odd, quite specific mode of living.

And what will I do when these brief, regular performances are no longer requested? No one has told me this, but I suspect that the most frightening thing about retirement may be the sudden stillness of one's own voice. A few of us, very few, will be invited to schools and conferences to go on talking and put off the day of silence. Most of us will just have to go home and be silent. How will we get along with ourselves?

6

I walk through the small library at all hours. Students sit at tables, isolated by reading. A girl is sleeping in a carrel, cheek on forearms, her dark hair rumpled and sweaty.

I feel tenderness toward them. This is because I have grown older on the job. When I began teaching they were more or less my equals—rivals, friends, enemies, sexual possibilities. But they have remained the same age, while I have run in a panic through my life. They have been stable; I have been unstable. They have remained faithful; I am the traitor.

Teaching is an encounter with death, more palpably and immediately than philosophy is. (But then for Plato teaching and philosophy were not clearly separable.) Walking through the classroom door reminds you that you are about to expend fifty more minutes out of your limited supply. You can feel them leaving as you speak. Teaching is a real-time affair: its substance is the changes that may occur, in any of you, as you live through the minutes you use. As you live, of course, you change. But some of the changes are deliberate, occasioned, and these change the living you do next.

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Other forms of labor highlight the passing of time as well, but teaching more so, because its medium is typically language. Words don't stay in the world for long. They fade instantly, like piano tones. And we can have (in the nature of the thing) only a deflected and fragmented knowledge of their effects on others. So there is a recurrent moment, as I walk away from class—for me, at least, more usually after a good class—when someone calls after me down the hall and I flinch, deeply, viscerally, and then shrug off the salutation with a violent internal shudder. The call is not too much to be borne but too much to be borne patiently or peaceably. *Nos morituri.* Don't remind me.

7

Maybe students are aware of this, I don't know (or recall), and this is why they fasten on us the stereotype of "The Old Prof." Mr. Chips. The teacher in *Dead Poets Society.* It may be the same sentimentality we use to keep from acknowledging that our parents will die. But such images also recapitulate the determination of our society not to be moved by thought. The image assimilates the teacher, making her just a function of the neutered academic myth, though she may in fact have lived her whole intellectual life in rebellion against both the academic myth and its sponsoring culture. *Dead Poets Society*—this explains its popularity—has it both ways: the martyred teacher rebels against a tyrannical administration in favor of a commonplace educational liberalism that any actual dean would be delighted with.

As for Chips, he is appalling. He is a blunderer without interest in his subject, the perfectly obsequious instrument of his cultural place and time. In the sixth section of Hilton's story, Chips is visited by a former ghetto boy, now a soldier (it is early in World War I). The soldier wants to thank Chips for organizing an outing to the public school years earlier. "One o' the best days aht I ever 'ad in me life," he says in his cute and deplorable accent, and then is erased to a grateful blur in Chips's memory by a sweet and comely death at Passchendaele.

There is a Ms. Chips as well, sexless but maternal (or sororal), devoted to literature or simply, like Chips, to the existence *in perpetuam* of her school. And an Anti-Chips: students will idealize a mentor in cynicism, though it is not unheard-of that, as the career draws to a close, Anti-Chips will reveal the essential sentimentality of his identity by attracting, or even desiring, the guise of Chips himself.

They are all avoidances of death—that is, of the facts of the classroom—whether assigned by students or desired and connived by teachers. They are also guild markings, professional manners. Sometimes, I suspect, they are camouflage for a genuine vocation. Sift the genuine

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teachers out of the institutional mix of grant winners, politicians, and computer mavens, and you will find them using different apparent adjustments to the system. The desire to teach because it is one's calling needs disguise now, because it is so thoroughly exploitable.

8

And it has become desperately complex, largely because of our ambivalence about authority. Teaching is, among other things, a use of, an appeal to, authority—inasmuch as a correct date or a clear distinction has authority, limits what we are free to think. We are not wrong to be suspicious of claims to authority: that sleepwalking charmer, Chips, was part of the ideological production of the victims of Passchendaele. But unless there is no clear distinction between a clear distinction and a blow to the mouth, we must have the authority of the one to set, as our only real academic retort, against the other.

Has anyone stated the complexity that our confusion about authority introduces into the classroom? I am speaking, still, of the experience of genuine teachers. They inform and distinguish and enforce. They also perform and enact, even entertain. But this work has become impossibly self-conscious. For the pretense is that the students are educating themselves. The teacher is paid to provide knowledge, planning, intellectual technique, encouragement, discipline, and evaluation, all potent enough to produce miracles and self-effacing enough to convince the students that they are doing everything themselves. Of course there are geniuses of this pretense; but on them the demands seem impossibly high. I think this explains the exhaustion that so frequently overtakes teachers after a decade's work, and the number of them who finish out in mechanical indifference what began as a morally exemplary calling.

We use up teachers by demanding the impossible from them, and we do this because we demand something impossible from education as a whole—to redeem society from the consequences of our quite deliberate plans for it. Since World War II, American culture has been redesigned for the comfort of the corporation. We have undercut the influence of other social institutions, families, churches, unions, and professions, in order to discourage the formation of any intellectual or moral independence that might question what corporations do. Not even corporations, however, can function in the resulting anomie. They too need reserves of informed, intellectually self-reliant, liberal, nonracist, nongenderist people. We have demanded, therefore, that the schools provide these people *ex nihilo,* or at least without the fabric of an intellectual and moral culture. Schools, after all, unlike families and churches, are supported by taxes. Let them do their work.

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But schools cannot redeem society; the redemption, whatever it might entail, must go the other way. Of the postwar criticisms of American education that retain interest, Goodman's may be the best, because he understood the priority of culture as a whole. "Fundamentally," he wrote, "there is no right education except growing up into a worthwhile world." The pressure we put on schools, to create, by themselves, a "worthwhile world" is mainly a way of avoiding the practical corollary of Goodman's principle—that we must reform the other institutions of our culture before schools can resume their proper function.

But it is evident to the dimmest undergraduate that money and technological advance rule the social world, and that schools have influence only insofar as they fall in line. The pretense that students teach themselves is only a disguise for the education they have received before coming to school, and the themes of this earlier, deeper education are money and technological advance. That everyone must "receive the benefits of higher education" in identical schools merely levels the field for the corporations. It guarantees that these candidates for employment will have had the proper training. No political ferment or wayward moral acuteness will ruck up the turf.

9

In his autobiographical reflections, *A Pitch of Philosophy*, Cavell speaks of "the trauma of the birth of culture in oneself," and it seems to me that I recognize this event, or sign, in myself, and that the wound of it has never healed. For me, as for Cavell, it came in part from music. For me—as not, I take it, for Cavell—it came also from poetry and in church.

This experience and its sources seem worth exploration, because they may help to explain why I went on teaching. That the birth of faith—the second birth—may be traumatic will be obvious even to those who have not read Kierkegaard, though he is the classic expositor and dramatist of the fact for us. But faith has an ambivalent relation to culture—both antithetical to it and creative of it, as river source to river mouth or the throw of dice to the score. Belief teaches you that life carries demands that cannot be finessed or negotiated. Then you discover that serious music (for instance) makes this same kind of demand, which is why it often has a religious source or reach. Bach's work will make no allowances for you; you can't make easy friends with it; it takes away your self-assurance. Now your assurance must come from having lived up to its demands—but you cannot, and so the wound never heals.

That belief and music make similar demands does not, of course, mean that they always act in concord. Belief may require that one give up chorales and epics and other modes of normal cultural life. The life of

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faith means, in part, standing ready to do so. This is what Nietzsche called "the ascetic ideal" and why he saw art as opposed to it. It was not so much that he thought we should choose art over religion, as that he saw art as transcending the necessity of choosing. The moment you must choose between things of great value and things of ultimate value was, for Kierkegaard, the birth of ethical consciousness, and Nietzsche was determined to deny that moment its power. For him it was to be replaced by "lying," heroic fabrication, the source both of art and of the basic forms of culture.

Nietzsche's idea has been recently popular, at least in the humanities, because it lets us see academic work as having a form of ultimate value without tying us to belief. Not having undergone the birth of culture in school—neither church nor my encounters with serious music and poetry owed anything to school—I have never been more than a sojourner in the academy. This is in great part why I have chosen to remain a teacher of undergraduates. The higher you go in the attics of the American university, at least, the more professionalized the project becomes, and the less likely it is that you will encounter someone, as George Steiner says, "proudly sick with thought, hooked," or sick with the desire of thinking—or wounded with music, or willing to be wounded.

But where is Cavell in this, and what has his trauma cost? Further on in *A Pitch of Philosophy*, he speaks of the fact that "philosophy cannot have the grounding that it seeks" and suggests that "perhaps it will find a cure or a close." Philosophy here stands in for the aspirations of art and faith as well. The birth of culture traumatizes because we see there is no alternative to culture—that following out our lines of inquiry will never bring us to heaven or even to earth ("grounding"). We may hope for a "cure or a close," however, as we value the "intellectual companionship" on the way. But what would the intellectual companions do if culture did find its cure? What would we do with Harvard?

It is interesting to me, in this regard, that Cavell should turn so often to Thoreau and Emerson. Neither was a university mind, and Cavell strikes me as having an ideal (if exceptionally subtle and brilliant) university mind. Though the rigor of his attention to language sometimes sounds revolutionary, this is (I think) a dividend he is drawing from his texts, especially from Thoreau. The paragraph that begins with trauma ends with a reflection considerably less climactic and demanding—that Cavell's work serves a "perspective from which . . . [the] options and objects with which the world is conversant make the world in which, and in terms of which, to choose." This is sly: "world" here is so equivocal as to be a pun. Worldliness constitutes the "world" of thought; yet it excludes *the world,* that entity of illimitable time and elaboration in which you never know what is around the corner. But Cavell draws on "world" in this larger sense as well. For what his choosing means to achieve is "a small

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alteration" by which "the world"—this is THE world?—"might be taken a small step—or half step—toward perfection." This is what I would call negotiating with the nonnegotiable. Such half steps are not at all what Thoreau meant when he demanded his harrowing moral economy. I do not credit this kind of perfection. I do not think, I have never believed, the wound of culture (or of faith) could be ameliorated.

10

These notes may sound like evidence of disillusionment or discouragement. I do in fact feel these things, but not toward the possibility of teaching itself, only toward the academic world in which I have chanced to spend my professional life, the postwar academy drafted by Milton Eisenhower and Clark Kerr into the service of our lethal economy. Teaching constituted, or circumstanced, in a different way might be a noble thing.

Yet it is, under present conditions, the object of utopian vision only. Goodman knew this, I believe, yet insisted that "we should be experimenting with different kinds of school, no school at all, the real city as school, farm schools, practical apprenticeships, guided travel, work camps, little theaters and local newspapers, community service." Such a suggestion envisions a working intellectual culture diffused through society, with local peculiarities and traditions of learning—the very kind of culture the global university has always known it must destroy.

"If a man has had one teacher in his life," my father said to me one day, out of the blue, "he can consider himself lucky." He had two, and has never ceased to speak of them with respect and intensity, as if, now that he is in his eighties, they are still looking over his shoulder. But then he is a violinist and a composer, and his education owed almost nothing to the standard American schooling of his day. His teachers were, in a sense, his parents; they brought forth in him an exacting, precise set of skills, a wisdom, a responsibility, a knowledge of artistic right and wrong, that they had inherited from their teachers as a form of love.

Someone—I think the cellist Bernard Greenhouse—has left a picture of Pablo Casals teaching. Knees to knees with the young cellist, Casals plays a phrase from the Bach unaccompanied suites, and then pauses while the student plays it. "No," Casals says, and plays it again. The student plays it again. "No," Casals says, this time perhaps with a comment or a joke, and plays it again. And so on for the whole lesson.

This is more like it. The teaching is urgent, intense, and full of character. Yet the personalities involved are in a sense beside the point. The people, their entire selves, skill, talent, feeling, memory, moral and political commitments, are inextricable from the performance of the phrase,

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and yet are not the end of the exercise but merely the means. They are gates in the river of the ongoing performance of Bach's vision, or audition.

I never had a teacher at all, by this criterion or anything like it—there were intelligent and well-meaning people, of course, but not this. Nor have I had students—or exceedingly few—who would have put up with such teaching. I don't blame my students: Casals's teaching would be unjust in my classroom, because it would violate the expectations on which the classroom has been premised and the fee paid. My students have expected the teaching their cultural world requires, the bland, undemanding, rather mechanical, rather good-humored obedience to the state-supervised curriculum—and, of course, the pretense that the students are finding their own way to its conclusions. Neither Casals's rigor nor his anarchism would be appropriate here. Occasionally I have felt my classroom talk growing taut with something like his intensity. My students have generally responded with bewilderment. Perhaps this should not have stopped me. Perhaps there have been moments when my effort to be morally and verbally accountable in public, in speech, has had an effect. I have no record of such moments. I don't know how they would be recorded: academic record keeping is not tuned to them. So it is up to others to say.

II

Having admitted that my vision of teaching is utopian, I will indulge it further.

I would be glad to teach in a college that printed its catalogue on one side of a sheet of typing paper, one course of study for everyone, for one fee. I would be glad if there were room on the sheet, after the formalities, for Nietzsche's sentence about scholarship, from *The Birth of Tragedy* ("For the first time in history someone had *come to grips* with scholarship—and what a formidable, perplexing thing it turned out to be!"), and perhaps a few measures from *The Art of Fugue.*

The curriculum of this school would be chosen and rationalized by the faculty acting under the rule of consensus. All texts would, of course, be carried to class in the pocket. The canon of these texts would be variable. Those who dream of a one-culture canon have not considered what an enormous multicultural grab Homer and Bach represent in themselves.

I would be glad to teach in a school whose new president was inaugurated in ten minutes between classes, standing up with the trustees and anyone else who was free, all in everyday clothes. The new president could

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promise to do her best. As sometimes happens, I understand, in Quaker schools, she could leave her office door open to visitors as she worked.

In my ideal school, scholarly writing (or essays like this) would be limited to one piece every few years. Or we could establish a ration book system in which one teacher could trade coupons with another who had a book to write, in return for the right to five or ten years' silent thinking. This way many fewer books would be written. Most would be short enough to be accommodated in small paperbound form. Otherwise the college would keep a copy for the stacks.

In my school, the faculty would include a practicing homemaker, midwife, carpenter, businessperson, plumber, farmer, forester, and string quartet. I could have my office, as a teacher of poetry, in the physics or economics department. Or we could pick offices at random, by lot, every semester. We wouldn't have many books to move from office to office, and the ones we had would be light.

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The Nomads of Language

ARIEL DORFMAN

I believe it was Gabriel García Márquez who told me the story of entire Colombian villages that were migratory. Fleeing from catastrophes, plagues perhaps, or recurrent floods, or merely the desolation of being caught in the middle of civil wars, inhabitants of these villages decided, at some point in history, to uproot themselves, moving to a remote location in search of peace. As they packed every belonging that could be transported, they did not forget what was most important to them: their dead. According to García Márquez, these villagers, on the verge of becoming nomads, dug up the bones in the cemetery and, in effect, carried their ancestors on their journey into the unknown, probably animated by the need to defy the fluctuations of time and geography with the illusion that something from the past permeates the present, forming a hard physical link to memory at a time of devastating change.

Not all migrants, of course, can push to such extremes their desire to stay connected to the men and women who generated them. Most are barely able to bring with them a photo, a clipping, the keys to a house that is no longer theirs and that may, in time, be demolished, its address lost. But all will inevitably take on their travels another sort of possession, one that invisibly preserves those faraway dead and their past and their receding land better than any bones can. In every era, migrants have transferred with them the syllables and significances enclosed in the lan-

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guage they learned as they grew, the language that gave them a slow second birth as surely as their mother gave them a relatively rapid first one. That language, which contains the seeds of their most intimate identity, will be put to the test when the voyage is over, especially if the migrants are moving to a foreign land. This is because those who await them at the new location have their own dead, their own ceremonies and cemeteries, and, of course, their own tongue. If it happens to be the same language—let's imagine, for instance, an Argentinian who migrates to Spain or to the Dominican Republic, or a French-speaking woman from Zaire who comes to Marseilles—there will still be a valley of distances and misunderstandings between she who arrives and he who greets her, he who arrives and she who sells him bread. But more frequently in our globalizing world, those who come are faced with an alien tongue and are therefore condemned to live a bilingual fate. They cannot avoid the need to live for many years in two languages, torn between the public, dominant language, on the one hand, in which the police interrogate, the school principal speaks, business is conducted, groceries are bought, jobs are offered, signs and advertisements are written; and, on the other hand, the private, subjective set of words that keeps the newcomers in touch with the old home and homeland, and with the people they used to be.

How to deal with this incessant and often perverse doubleness, how to protect the fragile shell of the self from its bombardment by two needs and two communities, which read opposite meanings into every mouthful at every meal? From the beginning of history, migrants have wavered between extremes that promise to resolve and even abolish this fragmented, anguished condition. These possibilities are not available to everyone, but they are always present as phantasms, temptations that call to us, delusions of wholeness. One strategy, of course, is assimilation: the migrant seeks to become an integral part of the new society, tries to forget or hide the mother tongue, wants to blur the accent, fantasizes that all bonds to the past can be cut, makes believe the dead are really, entirely dead. And if he cannot do this himself—because languages cannot be cast off like old clothes—there is always the dream that this full status in the new society will materialize with his children or, eventually, his grandchildren, so that some far-off offspring will overcome the curse of a bilingual, duplicated existence. The opposite of this solution is the rejectionist model: I have seen Chilean compatriots of mine who, twenty-five years after they were first banished from their land, continue in a stubborn refusal to learn more than a few words of the host country's language, their faces and their hearts nostalgically fixed on a remote country, their tongues repeating colloquialisms that, in fact, have fallen out of use back home. It is not necessarily a tactic doomed to failure. They plan to return to Chile someday, and—like so many Kurdish and Moroccan, Indonesian and Korean, Nigerian and Mexican émigrés in a

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similar situation—indulge in a tactic of cultural survival that holds on to the native language as a pure and intact entity, a bridge, a down payment on that ticket home.

These two strategies, assimilation and rejection, represent the two extremes with which monolingualism, its temptation of immaculateness, tugs at the heart and mind of every potential migrant attempting to avoid a Janus-like existence. Of the two, assimilation is the more powerful. Influential and effective institutions align themselves behind this monolingual alternative, first and foremost the nation-state, with all its resources brought to bear on creating and enforcing borders and boundaries, imposing them on geography and bodies, on flags and hymns, as well as on syllables and relative clauses, identifying the nation with a language as a bulwark against foreign contamination, always wanting to control and homogenize its population in the name of security and internal order. And that national language also thrives by its alliance with those structures in which it is embedded: religion, literature, family rituals, all of them allowing citizens to imagine themselves as members of a vast community. To this we must add the ingrained psychological need of every human to belong and blend in and succeed, the enticement to erase what reminds us of failure or pain.

I happen to disagree with the monolingual option, both for countries and for human beings. But I also happen to understand the wellsprings from which the desire to be whole and indivisible in one language flow, having been myself a fundamentalist of language, someone who, for decades, tried to escape the bifurcation of tongue and vocabulary—first rejecting my native Spanish for English as a child, and then, as a young man, refusing to speak English and reconverting to Spanish, and finally, once I was sent into exile from Chile, embracing the need to live in two dimensions, to pledge loyalty to two cultures, to use one language to speak to the mailman and the other to read the mail from home that he brings to our door. For me—a resident of this dual existence, married to two tongues, inhabited by English and Spanish in equal measure, in love with them both now that they have called a truce for my throat—the distress of being double and somewhat homeless is overshadowed by the glory of being hybrid and open. It is as a fluid bigamist of language that I now encourage migrants and the states in which they dwell to embark fully and without fear upon the adventure of being bilingual, and ask them also to celebrate, as so many of the young do, the many intermediate tongues (condescendingly termed patois) that prosper in the spaces between established linguistic systems, the myriad creole zones of confluence where languages can mix and experiment and express the fluctuating frontiers of a mingled humanity.

This call of mine is not merely, I believe, the fruit of my own personal

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back-and-forth romance with two languages. Just as there are institutions that compel us toward the adoption of only one language in order to defend our identities under siege, there are equally strong forces in the world today that push us toward multilingualism as a real alternative. First is the sheer mass of migration, all those bodies and minds smuggling foreign grammar across borders under the noses of immigration officers and customs officials, penetrating the defenses of the nation-state, invading the fields and the kitchens and the schools. In the case of the country where I now live, the United States, the Latino influx is so enormous and unstoppable that within a century I expect exploding demographics to make bilingualism the norm rather than the exception.

A second major condition favoring bilingualism is the way in which distances that used to separate migrants from their native lands have been compressed. We now have the feasibility of ever more frequent circular journeys back and forth to Ithacas from which we no longer need to be absent for twenty years, not to mention the manner in which technology allows us to connect to the simultaneous words being spoken back in the motherland—as well as to ever wider international networks of linguistic partners across the globe, inciting communities to organize in webs that would have been unimaginable thirty years ago.

Which leads us to a third factor: The world itself, because of this incessant movement of bodies and goods and capital, is producing speakers who are increasingly multilingual. A great deal of this linguistic traffic is conducted in English—a circumstance that I greet with ambivalence. Although the near-universal spread of one of my languages allows me the convenience of breaking down travel and intellectual barriers, its predominance also fills me with suspicion. The ascendancy of English, like so many phenomena associated with globalization, leaves too many invisible losers, too many people silenced. Regarding languages and migration, I never forget the questions that are so often neglected when progress is abstractly celebrated, the questions that the real suffering human subjects face, one by one by one. Do you come from a place that is poor, that is not fully incorporated into modernity, that does not control a language that commands respect? Do you inhabit a language that does not have armies behind it, and smart bombs and modems and cell phones? Do you reside in a language that will one day be extinct, or whose existence does not have the kind of value in the marketplace that can get you a good job and help you in the everyday struggle to survive? Do you dwell in a language that is wonderful only for making love, for teaching your children the difference between right and wrong, or for praying to God? How does such a language defend itself in our globalizing world?

I hold no effortless answers to this quandary of globalization, but regarding the empire of language, I can at least console myself with the reminder that English, or whatever *lingua franca* will be used by many

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men and women from many nations, will itself undergo—is, indeed, undergoing at this very moment—the slings and joys of outrageous appropriation, the mongrelization that inevitably comes when transnational people breed bodies and syllables. But perhaps more crucial: the new global disorder enacts a world where more and more people, submitted to the obligation of dividing their brains between two (or more) linguistic systems, end up deterritorializing language, unlinking it from the power of the nation and the coercion of the state, allowing other tormented bilinguals to feel accompanied in their own quests for the sort of pluralistic citizens that I hope would constitute a model for tomorrow's new humanity.

If I am optimistic about the prospect of bilingualism, it is because I believe that languages—in spite of their conservative tendency, which answers a need in us for stability and continuity—have themselves always been maddeningly migrant, borrowing from here and there and everywhere, plundering and bringing home the most beautiful, the strangest, the most exciting objects, learning, learning, taking words out on loan and returning them in different, wonderfully twisted, and often funny guises, pawning those words, stealing them, renting them out, eating them, making love to them, and spawning splendidly unrecognizable children.

Indeed, the first bilingual experiences, at the origin of our species, must have flourished in the intersections between groups that had already evolved divergent and mutually incomprehensible linguistic systems. There was the intersection of trade, the bartering of goods that had to be accompanied, at some point, by the bartering of words and the dawning discovery that anyone who knew both tongues would be able to sell and buy, swap and acquire, on far better terms—trading stories first, then desires, and finally goods. And there was that other intersection, the crossroads of war, when captives were taken as booty, and warriors were spared or enslaved, and women were brought back for breeding. I think of those captives as the first nonvoluntary bilinguals of history and prehistory, though they may also have been the first to educate their captors in the delights of another language and another viewpoint, Scheherazades of the forked tongue. And then the ultimate intersection, the marriage of languages due to the sweeter meeting of love and reproduction, the biological and cultural and personal and epic need for exogamy, the need for the other, the age-old impulse toward mixture and miscegenation, the cell's urge to fertilize by expanding, the need to leave the suffocating inner circle of what is familiar and plant yourself in the wider world. And languages were there, had to be there, in those love affairs at the beginning of time, one language for the man, another language for the woman, coupling the bodies and coupling the minds and coupling the tribes.

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Languages, two of them, both of them, there, at the very start of the journey out of Eden—an immediate, almost automatic way of challenging death, telling us today that we need not uproot the cemetery as those mythical villagers in Colombia did, that we need not carry the physical bones with us into the future in order to stay in touch with our origins and dispute death's rule. If this vision of the bilingual origins of our humanity is correct, then the chances of our living simultaneously in multiple linguistic systems not only may be daringly contemporary but may have roots in our most ancient mirrors. If language is our first and last attempt to defeat death, then perhaps a bilingual humanity is the best way of fooling death when it comes for us, fooling it not once but twice, and perhaps even three times and more. Perhaps before we disappear from this earth, we can at least force death itself to speak all our tongues.

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Why Do We Still Read Homer?

ANDREW SZEGEDY-MASZAK

I am a professor of classical studies. Today, when the field's very name seems to be accompanied by a puff of dust and the soft rustle of old books falling apart, it can be difficult to recapture how important the classics once were in higher education and in the culture at large. At the beginning of this century, the great Cambridge scholar F. M. Cornford reflected on the enduring allure of Greek and Roman antiquity: "The ancient classics resemble the universe. They are always there, and they are very much the same as ever. But as the philosophy of every new age puts a fresh construction on the universe, so in the classics scholarship finds a perennial object for ever fresh and original interpretation."

I find Cornford's remarks both touching and heartening, even though the social and academic context within which he wrote was so vastly different from our own. In 1903, despite some major university reforms, classical antiquity still served as the matrix within which leading intellectuals could debate the most urgent issues of their own time. Whether the topic at hand was the extension of democracy, or women's rights, or the definition of virtue in civil society, or the ennobling—or destructive—effects of art, classical antecedents and allusions were deployed to reinforce the argument. William Ewart Gladstone, to choose an exceptional example, was not only one of the most powerful and energetic politicians in the Victorian world but also the author of numerous articles and four books on Homer, one of which—*Studies on Homer*—weighs in at three volumes and almost seventeen hundred pages. As Richard Jenkyns has noted, Homer and politics were very closely associated in Gladstone's life. For instance, while

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Gladstone was writing one section of *Studies on Homer*, he was campaigning in Parliament against the Divorce Bill, so in that chapter he emphasized the absence of divorce in Homeric society. In this regard, Gladstone was unique only in the prominence of his position and the intensity of his dedication. No matter what profession a student was preparing for, he or she was expected to have some acquaintance with the classics.

Francis Cornford himself was a source for much fresh and original interpretation, especially of Thucydides and Plato. Brilliant as he was, he could not, of course, foresee the devastation of World War I, which broke out almost exactly a decade after he delivered the address from which I have quoted. I do not mean to be flippant about the horrible sufferings entailed by that war when I say that one of its casualties was the secure primacy of classical studies. From its active position at the center of intellectual life, our discipline was moved to a kind of honorable semi-retirement.

This does not mean, however, that it has gone dormant. As Cornford observed, fresh and original interpretation keeps the field alive. In fact, we are now in the middle of an oddly extensive revival of popular interest in classical studies. A few years ago NBC produced a two-night *Odyssey* extravaganza. The program's Web site did give credit where credit is due; I quote verbatim:

> Time & dates: Sunday and Monday, May 18 & 19, 1997 (9–11 p.m. ET) on NBC
> Executive producers: Francis Ford Coppola, Fred Fuchs, Robert Halmi Sr. and Nicholas Meyer
> Producer: Dyson Lovell
> Teleplay by: Andrei Konchalovsky and Christopher Solimine
> Based on the epic poem by: Homer

So far, so good, but to indicate the level at which this entire enterprise was pitched, I might cite a question from the network's *Odyssey* trivia quiz:

> Where is the Parthenon located?
> - Troy
> - Rome
> - Athens
> - Ithaca

The correct answer could win you a prize.

The NBC *Odyssey* turned out to be an embarrassing mess, reducing Homer's wonderful saga to an incoherent series of dopey or hysterical episodes. Disney's *Hercules* was far more entertaining. The plot, pure Disney, has Hercules grow out of adolescent clumsiness into full herohood, complete with triumph over the cheerfully malevolent Hades and

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romance with the winsome Megara. The radio and TV ads featured a perky jingle whose refrain was "Who put the glad in gladiator? *Hercules!*" I must admit that I was mildly disappointed that the cartoon did not include the part of the myth in which Hercules goes berserk and murders his wife and children. That probably would have taken too much of the *glad* out of *gladiator* for family viewing.

Speaking of gladiators, I did not see the recent sword-and-sandal blockbuster, but my classicist colleagues spent a lot of time and bandwidth debating it on various on-line discussion groups. They seemed evenly split between those who cheerfully asserted that we should applaud anything that draws public attention to our little corner of academe and those who gloomily decried the film's historical inaccuracies. It is easy and amusing to make fun of such obviously giddy commercial excess, like the film's virtual-reality version of the ancient Roman cityscape in which, some claim, the dome of St. Peter's is clearly visible. Nonetheless, in this instance I tend to agree with the more optimistic faction. I do not think that "popular culture" is necessarily a contradiction in terms, and if *Gladiator* has kindled some interest in Roman history, so much the better.

Classical studies, however, have also been playing a more serious role in contemporary culture. It is striking, for example, that within a few months of its publication in 1996, Robert Fagles's brilliant new translation of the *Odyssey* became a bona fide best-seller. When Fagles came to read at Wesleyan, where I teach, he was greeted by an overflowing and hugely enthusiastic audience, many of whose members were carrying his book. As a rough-and-ready gauge of this translation's continuing popularity, an Amazon.com ranking last autumn put the paperback edition of Fagles's *Odyssey* at 3,470 out of a possible several hundred thousand; for comparison, Anita Diamant's biblical novel *The Red Tent* occupied the number one spot among paperbacks, while Charles Frazier's superb novel *Cold Mountain*, structured on the *Odyssey*, was at 6,728. That's not bad for Homer.

I would like to use the *Odyssey*—Homer's epic poem, not the TV show—as a kind of test case for some consideration of where classical studies stand today. For a few specific topics, I will choose a representative older approach and then sketch the modern version thereof. I am a historian, not a Homeric scholar, so what follows is necessarily selective and partial and quite broad-brush—but not, I hope, distorting. I hope it will also give some idea of why we still read Homer.

In the nineteenth century, there was a pervasive belief that the Homeric poems were fundamentally historical documents. In the words of the historian Frank Turner, "Every significant Victorian commentator believed that in describing and criticizing Homeric characters, religion or society, he was dealing either with events that had actually occurred or

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with a society that had actually existed." The belief in the historicity of Homer, which actually had strong roots in the eighteenth century, was given a tremendous boost by Heinrich Schliemann's discoveries in Troy and Mycenae. Schliemann had made his fortune in business by 1870, when his love of the Homeric epics and his conviction that they were "true" led him to excavate in northwest Turkey, at the site he identified as Troy. Schliemann found there a walled city, copious Bronze Age artifacts, and a burnt stratum that corresponded chronologically with the most widely accepted date for Homer's Trojan War. His finds were the subject of intense public interest and spectacular publicity, which were enhanced still further a few years later when Schliemann made another strike at another revered ancient site, Mycenae. One of the epithets applied to Mycenae in the Homeric poems is "rich in gold," and the description seemed amply verified by Schliemann's finds. The hilltop citadel yielded weapons and gold treasure in abundance. When he saw one of the funerary masks his workers had uncovered, Schliemann is said to have exclaimed, "I have looked on the face of Agamemnon."

Schliemann was the most famous—and most successful—follower in the longstanding tradition of travelers who relied on the geographical and topographic specificity of the Homeric epics for both inspiration and information. Again and again in the travel narratives from the period, we find the aesthetic swoon exemplified in the remark that "the *Iliad* has new beauty on the banks of Scamander." Lord Byron had spent some time in the Troad in the early part of the century and opined of the Homeric epic, "I venerated the grand original as the truth of history . . . and the truth of place; otherwise it would have given me no delight." The whole nineteenth-century approach, then, was geared toward the extraction of historical nuggets from epic ore. For such purposes the *Iliad* was good, but the *Odyssey*, with its plethora of place names and its vivid and detailed descriptions, was even better. The brilliant American photographer William James Stillman, for example, hired a small ship in 1886 and embarked on a two-month voyage intended to be—and eventually written up as—"On the Track of Ulysses." Stillman's record of his cruise emphasizes the reality of such locations as the island of Ithaca and even Scylla and Charybdis, identified as the Straits of Messina. Homer, it was clear, had traveled widely around the Mediterranean.

Our own pursuit of the track of Ulysses is very different from that of our nineteenth-century predecessors. It is not too strong to say that a revolution in our understanding of the Homeric world occurred in 1954 with the publication of a little book by Moses Finley. Although its title, *The World of Odysseus*, would not have been out of place in a Victorian catalogue, Finley used economic and anthropological methods to examine the structures that underlay Homeric society. In summarizing the premise that guided his work, he stated, "Essentially the picture offered by the

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poems of the society and its system of values is a coherent one." Finley was a Marxist (red-baited out of a tenured position at Rutgers during the McCarthy years), as well as an expert on the ancient economy; but his method is anything but doctrinaire as he analyzes kinship relations, status and wealth, and the ethical and religious values that inform the Homeric poems. His scholarship was not aimed at weighing the truth or falsehood of every "factual" statement—Is there really a wide-mouthed cave near the beach at Ithaca? Did chariots have one or two axles?—but at seeking the details of Homeric narrative information about society and ideology.

The picture that emerges is, as Finley said, coherent; but of course that does not mean that it is simple or unitary. We find a social system based on small groups, led by a warrior elite, the heroes, who control the best lands and possess the most impressive luxury goods. Beneath them are multiple levels of kin and retainers, whose positions are defined by their relations to the leader and reinforced by an elaborate social protocol. Among the heroes, there exists as well a complicated set of competitive and cooperative practices, ranging from warfare and athletic contests to intermarriage to gift giving and the ritual extension and acceptance of hospitality (*xenia*). Earlier scholars, including Gladstone, had noted the existence of such customs, but Finley brought them together in a new synthesis. He showed that Homeric society was neither pure fantasy, a mythic never-never land, nor pure sunbaked Mycenaean reality, but a recreation of old stories in a world whose main features the poet's audience would have recognized as its own. Finley, moreover, never lost sight of why we still read Homer: "the pre-eminence of Homer lies in the scale on which he worked; in the elegance and structural coherence of his complex narrative, in the virtuosity with which he varied the repeated typical scenes; in his feeling for tone and tempo . . . in short, in the freshness with which he both invented and manipulated what he had inherited." This is not a bad summary of Finley's own achievement.

While the analysis of Homeric values and society remains a rich area for scholarly investigation, it also continues to accompany what we would think of as more strictly literary criticism. In 1962 Robert Fagles co-edited a collection of critical essays, stories, and poems on Homer. The essays include such acknowledged classics as Erich Auerbach's study of Homeric narrative technique, "The Scar of Odysseus." In the scene that gives the essay its title, Penelope has ordered the old servant Eurykleia to wash the feet of her husband, who is still disguised as a beggar. As Eurykleia sets about her work, she sees on Odysseus's thigh a scar, inflicted long ago by a wild boar. The narrative jumps immediately to an account of the boar hunt, and then just as quickly back to the royal chambers, where Eurykleia starts to cry out in joy until Odysseus clamps his hand around her throat, forbidding her to speak. Auerbach uses this little episode as

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the basis for a discussion of Homeric narrative time, which, he argues, is a constant and vivid present. Fagles's anthology also contains some excellent examples of the old New Criticism, where close reading is used to establish patterns of image, symbol, and metaphor. I do not wish to disparage such approaches, for many of these essays, like Auerbach's, have become classics in their own right and are still referred to with respect.

Since the 1960s, when the bibliography in Homeric scholarship was already huge, it has grown exponentially, with hundreds of books and thousands of articles. Critical methodology has passed through feminism, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstruction, new historicism, and post-colonialism. Again, a minute example will have to stand in for the whole. In 1996, Princeton University Press published a volume called *Reading the Odyssey: Select Interpretive Essays.* The editor, Seth Schein, states in his preface what the collection intends to do: "The ten contributions reflect five major interpretive concerns of modern *Odyssey* scholarship: the poem's programmatic representation of social and religious institutions and values [one can hear the influence of Finley here]; its transformation of folktales and traditional stories into epic adventures; its representation of gender roles and, in particular, of Penelope; its narrative strategies and form; and its relation to the *Iliad,* especially to that epic's distinctive conception of heroism."

Most people know about the *Odyssey*'s adventure books, in which Odysseus encounters the Cyclops, the Sirens, and Circe and makes his way down to and back from the underworld. These stories are so familiar that it would seem that little new could be said about them. What about Polyphemus, the massive, one-eyed, solitary, sheepherding, cannibalistic giant? In the nineteenth century, as Richard Jenkyns has pointed out, Trollope's character Josiah Crawley found parallels between the Cyclops story and that of Samson: "It is the same story. Great power reduced to impotence, great glory to misery, by the hand of fate,—Necessity, as the Greeks called her; the goddess that will not be shunned." In other words, Polyphemus is a tragic hero, and his tale a moral fable. He has also been allegorized as an embodiment of unrestrained violence and appetite, whose brutality is brutally punished and psychologized as the baser impulses within us all. His blinding has been equated with castration. On the other side, some have seen the Cyclops as a noble savage whose idyllic life is disrupted by the meddlesome intrusion of Odysseus and his crew. Polyphemus may be all that and is certainly more besides.

Working on the foundation laid by Finley—who noted the Cyclopes' lack of agriculture, assembly, and formalized hospitality—the French scholar Pierre Vidal-Naquet has used the Polyphemus episode as a central element in his analysis of land and sacrifice in the *Odyssey.* A puzzling epithet applied to the Cyclops is that "he does not eat bread." Vidal-Naquet

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explains that this means that Cyclopes do not engage in agricultural labor but instead are purely pastoral. A significant corollary is that they do not perform sacrifice: "The Cyclopes have no regard for Zeus or for the blessed gods," boasts Polyphemus. For Homer's Greek audience, Vidal-Naquet argues, the absence of these two cultural practices—working the land and performing sacrifice—marks the Cyclops as non-human, even more than do his great size and monstrous appearance. Polyphemus's cannibalism is also a direct parallel to his species' non-participation in agriculture. Unlike human beings, he does not even use fire to cook his food. Vidal-Naquet has made excellent use of some of the methods of structuralism and anthropology to illuminate what he calls "religious and mythical meanings." By observing the presence, or absence, of agriculture and sacrifice, one can chart Odysseus's transition from the recognizably human world to the utterly fantastic.

The other figure most people recall from the *Odyssey* is, of course, Penelope. In the traditional view, she is passive, powerless, and unquestionably faithful. Although attractive and admittedly clever, as shown by her stratagem to keep the suitors at bay by weaving and unraveling the shroud for her father-in-law, she is one-dimensional. In his 1886 *Introduction to Homer,* R. C. Jebb, like most of his contemporaries, had little to say about her: "Penelope [is] loyal under long trial to her long-absent lord"; she and Odysseus evince "a pure and tender conception of conjugal affection." And that's about it. As recently as the 1950s, she could be described as "little more than a convenient 'mythologically available character.' "

Now, however, we have acquired an appreciation of Penelope's control over her own place and her own plot. It has long been recognized that she is a match for her wandering mate in cunning intelligence—culminating in her tricking him into revealing his identity—as well as in her ability to control her expressions of emotion. After all, much of the *Odyssey* depends on dissimulation, on not letting your enemies, or even your friends, know your identity or your intentions. One scholar has drawn a persuasive comparison between social life in the *Odyssey* and modern village life in Greece, where distraction or outright deception is the principal means of maintaining one's privacy.

Taking their cue from the manifest content of the story, contemporary critics have also come to emphasize the openness of the *Odyssey,* its narrative indeterminacy, in which Penelope's character plays a key role. Within the first thirty-five lines of Book One, we hear of the starkest contrast to a husband's happy homecoming: the murder of Odysseus's comrade-in-arms Agamemnon by his wife Clytemnestra. This story keeps reappearing throughout the poem and serves, continuously, as a potent counter-example and an open possibility. When Odysseus goes to Hades, the shade of Agamemnon warns him, "There is no trusting in women." In the

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new evaluation of Penelope, she is much more independent and much shiftier than she was before.

In one scene, for example, she adorns herself, appears before the suitors, and solicits gifts from them, with the implicit promise that she will marry whoever proves himself most generous. Homer tells us only that as Odysseus observes her in action, he is silently delighted, admiring her guile: "luring gifts from her suitors now, / enchanting their hearts with suave seductive words / but all the while with something else in mind." Such modern critics as Marilyn Katz, Sheila Murnaghan, and Nancy Felson have shown that we do not have to accept Odysseus's self-serving interpretation of his wife's behavior. Similarly, it is Penelope who instigates the climactic archery contest in Book Nineteen. Although we know that this challenge will lead directly to the slaughter of the suitors and Odysseus's restoration as lord of his household, we must now acknowledge, as Schein says, that Penelope proposes the test "in full preparation for her imminent marriage to one of her wooers." More broadly, then, we the audience are sure about what the outcome of Odysseus's return will be; yet the poem itself keeps presenting the tantalizing possibility that Penelope will decide that she's waited long enough, finish weaving the shroud, choose a successor husband, and, as a last resort, send Odysseus back to Hades, this time for good. In these new views of Penelope, we seem to have lost the perfect moral exemplar, the paragon of womanly virtue. But I would argue that what we have lost in uplift we have more than made up for in interest and complexity. Her recurrent epithet, "thoughtful Penelope," has acquired a whole new spectrum of meanings.

Far from robbing the *Odyssey* of its authority, these various interpretive approaches seem to me to confirm the epic's amazing density and sheer staying power. Not everyone agrees. In 1998, two classicists, Victor Davis Hanson and John Heath, made a splash with a book called *Who Killed Homer?* Its subtitle contains the authors' central message: "The Demise of Classical Education and the Recovery of Greek Values." Briefly, the authors contend that classical studies have suffered their drastic decline in enrollment and influence principally because of classicists. Reserving their fiercest fire for their academic colleagues, Hanson and Heath argue that classical scholars have abandoned the championing of "Greek values." H&H, as they have come to be known, summarize such "underlying cultural assumptions" in the form of seven principles: the separation of science and philosophy from religious and political authority (along with religion's separation from and subordination to political authority), civilian control of military power, constitutional and consensual government, faith in the average citizen, protection of private property from government interference, and the protection of dissent and constant questioning. In place of "Greek wisdom," claim H&H, modern

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professors have substituted self-promoting careerism, needlessly obscure and jargon-laden scholarship, and a rigidly exclusive (i.e., politically correct) agenda brewed out of multiculturalism, feminism, and literary theory.

As in the TV *Odyssey* and Disney's *Hercules,* one can certainly find instances of risible excess in modern scholarship, and Hanson and Heath have some nasty fun with it. One of the passages they quote will suffice: "If . . . a female critic accepts Odysseus' invitation to see herself, like Arete or Penelope, as an honored member of the audience for his story, she runs the risk of ignoring the link between this honor and an insidious class privilege that isolates her from other groups of women." This can only mean that a scholar who is a woman must not allow herself to enjoy Odysseus's stories uncritically, because she will then be colluding in a system that oppresses women. The warning seems to me to denigrate the very scholars it is meant to protect. Unnecessary as such an injunction may be, at least it is expressed in understandable language. Some other contemporary writing on classics is so theoretically sophisticated, and therefore arcane, that it is accessible only to a small band of initiates.

Still, these shots are easy when the targets are cardboard cutouts. In their relentlessly negative polemic, H&H misrepresent much contemporary scholarship and ignore much of what is best and most influential. They do not so much as mention a group of French scholars, including Vidal-Naquet, whose work has given a new direction and energy to Greek studies. It is true that within classical studies there are careerism and self-promotion, and they should not be rewarded; that we have to be more scrupulous in balancing professionalism and pedagogy; that there are fads and fashions in scholarship, as in almost anything else. As for these last, however, I do not share H&H's alarm and disdain, because I have great faith in the filtering power of time. The analyses that are merely trendy will go the way of yesterday's polyester leisure suit and today's promiscuous tattoos and body piercings; they will be slightly embarrassing footnotes in the history of the discipline. The work that makes a genuine, enduring contribution will continue to be read and used. To return to another of our earlier examples, Finley's *World of Odysseus* was published almost fifty years ago, and many of its conclusions have been refined or even superseded; yet it is still in print, still being assigned to students, still being referred to by scholars.

Louis MacNeice, who was for a time a professor of classics, was also a brilliant poet, and in a long autobiographical poem called "Autumn Journal" he writes about the approaching college term and the prospect of acting once again as "impresario of the Ancient Greeks." With rueful but sharp-edged humor, he etches the standard outline of why studying classics is good for you:

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The Glory that was Greece: put it in a syllabus, grade it
Page by page
To train the mind or even to point a moral
For the present age:
Models of logic and lucidity, dignity, sanity,
The golden mean between opposing ills . . .
So the humanist in his room with Jacobean panels
Chewing his pipe and looking on a lazy quad
Chops the Ancient World to turn a sermon
To the greater glory of God.

If you think about it, this is not too far from the underlying justification propelling *Who Killed Homer?* But MacNeice finds the traditional views unsatisfactory:

But I can do nothing so useful or so simple;
These dead are dead
And when I should remember the paragons of Hellas
I think instead
Of the crooks, the adventurers, the opportunists,
The careless athletes and the fancy boys,
The hair-splitters, the pedants, the hard-boiled skeptics
And the Agora and the noise
Of the demagogues and the quacks; and the women pouring
Libations over graves
And the trimmers at Delphi and the dummies at Sparta and lastly
I think of the slaves.
And how one can imagine oneself among them
I do not know;
It was all so unimaginably different
And all so long ago.

While we no longer look to Homer for direct moral or religious instruction, reading the epics allows (or requires) us to make a powerful effort of the intellect and the imagination to comprehend his society and its values. I know from my own experience of working with students that Homer still engages their attention. After all, lest we forget, the epics are great stories; they afford a pleasure more enduring than do enjoyable but ephemeral pop entertainments. I believe that one of the most important things we teachers can do for our students is to engage them in that pleasure and help them to see how these stories reflect the lives of real people, even in a world "so unimaginably different / And all so long ago."

It is striking that there continue to be such substantial changes in the way we see the ancient world, even though our core texts have remained

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the same for centuries. Just as in the *Odyssey* the blood of a sacrificed bull enables the ghosts in Hades to speak, our own ideas, as scholars and students, provide "blood for the ghosts" of antiquity. As Francis Cornford so eloquently declared, new theoretical approaches and new analytic methods offer "fresh and original interpretation." They keep reviving the old texts, making them speak to new generations.

In many ways, then, reading Homer embodies what I find most interesting and appealing about classical studies or, more broadly, about liberal education. It necessarily combines tradition and innovation, discipline and experimentation, and so one of the most important benefits that it can give us, if we attend to it, is versatility. It therefore offers a more extensive set of comparisons and metaphors than a more narrowly focused pre-professional training can. In the world of work and civic responsibility in which we live, and which our students are going to enter, access to such a broad range of approaches ideally allows for an equally broad range of creative responses to problems. If, like Odysseus, we "learn the minds of many people," we can become "skilled in all ways of contending." That is not a bad functional definition of liberal learning, and it is a partial but significant warrant for continuing to read Homer throughout the twenty-first century and beyond.

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Private View

CHRISTOPHER MATTHEWS

Christ, and don't these bastards talk! Now the light's gone bone dry
the yard starves back to two dimensions, slate parched by a puddle
the color of engine oil; this blinks in one corner
while another (can't blank the muted drivel of "views"
loose behind me) hoards, in patience, its gruel of black leaves.

An inheritance. Also the quietly striving trees
that lure the gray-brooded eye away from the hum
of the show—some Klees—and launch it across a wide valley
—stick river, municipal buildings, then clambering villas—
till it founders blank at the sky, that wide disclaimer.

As if domed in a bell jar. Here, the all-pensive man
—saw him how many years ago, but the mind takes pictures—
might have angled his naked head, and with thinking fingers
tried the weight and pain of this terrible still air.

Bern, 1942

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Mechanic

JOHN LUKACS

In 1654, when Oliver Cromwell was Lord Protector of England, some of the followers of the exiled Charles II issued "a proclamation in the King's name offering five hundred pounds, knighthood, and a colonel's commission, to anyone who succeeded in killing 'a certain mechanic fellow' called Oliver Cromwell, 'by pistol, sword or poison.'" The Pretender did not entirely discourage them, insisting only that such a killing should be part of a general royalist rising and "not an isolated act."

What I find interesting is not the Pretender's hesitation but the peculiarly English and pejorative sense of the word *mechanic*—according to the *Oxford English Dictionary:* "Belonging to or characteristic of the 'lower order'; vulgar, low, base. Obs.", meaning "now obsolete." Yet it was not *obs.* for a long time. It was preceded by *Mechanical,* "which in its early uses is somewhat closer to the sense of the Latin word"—again according to the *OED*—and also close or almost identical to what was then its meaning and appearance in many other Western European languages. In English, *Machinist,* too, seems never to have had a pejorative association; in any event, it is more precise than in French, where both *machiniste* and *mécanicien* may refer to a driver of engines, besides the charming and probably now obsolete use of *mécanicienne:* a girl using a sewing machine. But the history of the English *mechanic,* both as an adjective and as a noun, is different.

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In the broadest sense it meant having a manual occupation (though not in agriculture), or even working at a trade; in the somewhat narrower but common sense it was clearly disparaging—a connotation that seems to have emerged in the sixteenth century. Shakespeare used the word on occasion. In *Coriolanus:* "Do not bid me to dismiss my soldiers or capitulate again, with Rome's mechanics." Or in *Henry IV, Part II:* "mechanical and dirty hand," "of mean mechanical parentage." Among Shakespeare's contemporaries there was Hakluyt, 1589: " . . . mechanical men of base condition, [who] dare to censure the doings of them, of whose acts they be not worthy to talk." Another Elizabethan, John Marston, cited in the *OED,* 1599: "each mechanic slave. Each dunghill peasant. . . ."

In one instance, Swift described an apocethary as "a base mechanic." Someone else in the eighteenth century abjured both "Mechanick Theists and Atomic Atheists." As late as 1842, Lord Tennyson: "Lest . . . his nice eyes Should see the raw mechanic's bloody thumbs / Sweat on his blazon'd chairs." In *Daniel Deronda,* George Eliot wrote of "four mechanic wings that would not fly." There is a mention as late as 1880 of "mechanical orders," meaning the working class. Earlier, John Vanbrugh, the Restoration playwright and wit, wrote, in *The Confederacy,* "A woman must indeed be of the mechanic mould, who is either troubled or pleased by anything her husband can do for her." Evidently, *mechanic* in this sense meant automatic or thoughtless.

But it was Edmund Burke whose criticism of *mechanical* was something new. It signified his reaction to the inorganic and cold rationalism of the French Enlightenment. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France,* 1790, he wrote: "On the principles of this mechanick philosophy our institutions can never be embodied." This is no longer a dismissal of occupation or class. It is, instead, an assertion of the primacy of what is historical and organic over the mechanical and the abstract. In *Coningsby,* Disraeli in 1844 extolled that primacy: "The supreme control obtained by man over mechanic power." That "supreme control"—its assertion as a human ideal as well as its translation into practice—may be our main problem in the twenty-first century.

It is interesting to note that during the nineteenth century, about the same time when in England the reference to mechanics as a social class began to disappear, in the United States that sense of the word was current and strong; indeed, it became an assertion of working-class pride, infused with nativism and the ideal of popular sovereignty. In 1827, the first American party of urban workers, or trade union, was founded in Philadelphia, bearing the name "The Mechanics Union of Trade Associations." In the 1830s and 1840s, many new American hamlets or villages took names such as Mechanicsburg or Mechanicsville (it was in Mechanicsville, Virginia, that Robert E. Lee received his command in June 1862); in my state, Pennsylvania, there is also a Mechanics Grove, and in Maine,

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a Mechanics Falls. In the late 1840s and 1850s, the official name of the nativist and populist Know-Nothing Party was "the United Party of White American Mechanics." (One hundred and twenty years later there was at least a resonance of such inclinations among the hard-hat unionists who were encouraged by President Nixon's supporters to demonstrate against anti-Vietnam-War protesters in downtown New York City in 1970.) There is no entry for *mechanic* or *mechanics* in H. L. Mencken's *s*upplement to *The American Language;* but recently I read that among American gamblers in the 1930s, *mechanics* was a dismissive word: it referred to professional cardsharps.

My interest in *mechanic* is not philosophical or epistemological but historical. The earlier—but also surprisingly long-lived—identification of *mechanics* with *working-class* has become obsolete. But how about the association—indeed, the identification—of *mechanical* with *industrial?* In its earlier English usage, a mechanic was an industrial worker but not a peasant. Yet what is happening now, when the structure of entire societies, with their occupations and professions, has changed drastically? We have already entered a postindustrial age. (The Industrial Age was much shorter than we have been accustomed to think. It was in 1874 that, for the first time in history, there was a nation, England, where more people were involved in industrial than in agricultural production; and in 1956, for the first time, the United States had more people employed in services and in administration than in agricultural and industrial production *together.*) One consequence is that the terms *working class* and *middle class* now convey a meaningless distinction. Both categories have been stripped of their original, or even sensible, meaning; and, as far as possessions or income are concerned, the two former "classes" have become almost indistinct.

And yet: we live in a mechanical age. Much of our agricultural production has become mechanical. This postindustrial age, wrongly called the Information Age, depends on computers that are wholly mechanical; and not only are the instruments and the transmission mechanical, but so is the digital composition of images and sounds. Well before these technical transformations, a mechanical thinking (and seeing) had entered the American language. At the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, people called the first railway locomotives "iron horses." A century later, in America, an energetic businessman was approvingly described as "the spark plug of the organization," suggesting that at least as many people were acquainted with spark plugs as with horses. Well, there was a loss here: for while the first locomotives looked, at least a little, like iron horses, what man (or woman) looks like a spark plug? And, sooner or later, a smart whizzer will be called The Chip, or The Modem, and we will be yet one more step away from reality. Meanwhile, the very term *Informa-*

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tion Age is inaccurate: for what is really happening involves not information but the mechanical transmission and representation of preprogrammed data, numbers, sounds, and texts.

In sum, the mechanical age is postindustrial. One paradox of this condition is that now, when more and more of our work and everyday living is mechanical, there are fewer and fewer mechanics—meaning experts and repairers of machines. Another paradox is more meaningful, at least to this writer. All of our machines, and indeed the entire mechanical world, depend on mechanical causality, the prime conditions of which are: (1) the same causes must produce the same effects; (2) there must be an equivalence of causes and effects; and (3) the cause must always precede the effect. Yet in the twentieth century we learned—or at least ought to have learned—that mechanical causality (which was but one of the three or four causalities described by Aristotle) is insufficient. It is insufficient when it comes to the relations of human beings to other human beings (the most important and decisive of all relationships, because they involve not only religious or moral factors but also the interactions of the universe's most complex organisms). Mechanical causality is insufficient because of the intrusion of mind into the structure of events—in plain English, because what happens, while not identical, is not separable from what people think happens. But mechanical causality is insufficient, too, because of the collapse of Cartesian determinism within the physical study of the smallest components of matter. Whether we call it Indeterminacy or Uncertainty, Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr have not only asserted but proved the insufficiency of the above-mentioned desiderata of mechanical causality (which is why the very phrase "quantum mechanics" is, at least in one sense, an oxymoron).

Two centuries ago it was the romantic reaction against the rationalism of the Enlightenment that first formulated the difference—indeed, the contrast—between what is mechanical and what is organic. Out of this came the exaggerated German distinction between the categories of *Zivilisation* and *Kultur*. Oswald Spengler inflated that into a world-historical system. I happen to believe that this distinction has become at least as *obs.* as the equivalence of *industrial* = *mechanic* (just as the absolute categorical distinction of *organic/inorganic* is now *obs.* when it comes to the smallest particles of matter). There can be no culture without civilization; they are inseparable. Indeed, because of many conditions, including the relentless mechanization of life, it is civilization, even more than culture, that is now endangered. Two centuries after Edmund Burke, the American farmer, writer, and thinker Wendell Berry wrote: "It is easy for me to imagine that the next great division of the world will be between people who wish to live as creatures and people who wish to live as machines."

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Childfree in Toyland

CHRISTOPHER CLAUSEN

On the threshold of thirty and divorce, the personable daughter of a Southern Baptist minister once informed me calmly that any child of hers would probably be a battered child. She was being neither neurotic nor more self-centered than people usually are, merely honest about her strong preference not to have children. The feminist movement was just starting to make such a choice respectable in places where it had influence, which included universities like the one in which we both held temporary jobs. Nonetheless, most of her friends had built their nests and were furnishing them with babies. Her parents, like most, were eager for grandchildren. Determined to be the hero of her own life, what their daughter wanted instead was a Ph.D. and a career. Quite apart from professional ambitions, temperamentally she was one of those people for whom parenthood is an alien role. Her dramatic way of describing her feelings, to a man whose own marriage had recently ended because his wife wanted a child and he didn't, may have been an expression of how inexpressible they were in other circles of her life.

That was in the early 1970s. Since then, life and attitudes are widely assumed to have changed beyond recognition. More than half of married and unmarried women alike now work outside the home. Birth control has improved dramatically. In intellectual circles the phrase "family values" has become a term of ridicule, while "reproductive rights," like "choice," is an accepted synonym for legal abortion. In fact, the story told above seems almost too good to be true, though it is true. It seems to

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confirm a fashionable academic and journalistic stereotype of dramatic conflict in American society: the religious right versus women's freedom to have professional careers or to determine their own reproductive futures. An array of newspaper articles in the wake of the 2000 census pointed out, sometimes with alarm about an aging society, that the number of temporarily or permanently childless adults has been rising significantly since the seventies. One implication was that, except in the most benighted company, nobody today needs to feel defensive about being "childfree," a term used since the late 1980s by advocates for the rights of non-parents.

The truth is a lot messier, or at least harder to decipher, and has little to do with any ideology. As is usual in controversies about social trends, a variety of sometimes ambiguous statistics fly back and forth as ammunition. Perhaps the most helpful are a series issued by the National Center for Health Statistics that display by age cohort the percentage of American women who have never had at least one live birth. In 1998, the percentage of women in the oldest cohort, aged from forty to forty-four, who had never given birth was 16.5. (Almost no women give birth to a first child after their early forties.) With some fluctuations, the proportion of childless women in this age group declines as one goes back in time. In 1970, the earliest year with fully comparable figures, the percentage was 10.6.

This succession of numbers, however, may be interpreted in at least two ways. Enthusiasts for the childfree state, or observers frightened by its implications, can point out that the childless percentage among women who had reached their forties increased by more than half in twenty-eight years. The proportion who had never given birth grew even faster among women who were still in their twenties and thirties. But those who doubt that things have changed radically can note with equal justice that the vast majority of women—more than 80 percent—continue to have children, and that the childless percentage in all age groups seemed to level off by the mid-1990s. In its September 2000 report on the fertility of American women, the Census Bureau states that "childless levels are approximately the same now as they were a century ago." While both sexes marry later and have fewer children on the average than they did during the baby boom (if not later or fewer than during the Depression), the question of whether to have any children at all continues to be answered resoundingly in the affirmative.

Despite women's enormously larger participation in careers, despite the almost universal availability of reliable birth control, despite a solid generation of feminists assuring women that reproduction is a matter of choice, despite more than three decades of warnings about overpopulation and environmental degradation, despite the huge contemporary emphasis on personal freedom and self-gratification, despite the manifest

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economic advantages of childlessness—despite all these influences, having children is still overwhelmingly the norm. As the novelist Jennifer Weiner recently put it, "You're supposed to have the career, you're supposed to have the guy, you're supposed not to wait to have babies—and you're supposed to do it all really well and look really good while you're doing it." What has actually declined most strikingly is not the number of people who choose to have children but the link between childbearing and marriage. Although nearly nine out of ten Americans eventually marry at least once, the proportion of children who are born to unwed mothers now exceeds 30 percent and constitutes the most important cause of child poverty.

Like parenthood itself, the sentimentalizing of childhood that began with the Romantics some two hundred years ago shows no signs of decline in public or private life. Since the 1980s, children have become a justification for every kind of political proposal or government initiative, from regulating tobacco and HMOs to enacting campaign-finance reform to saving Social Security. In a famous flight of White House rhetoric from the mid-1990s, President Clinton announced, following an agreement to retarget Russia's ballistic arsenal, that no American child now had nuclear missiles aimed at him or her. Education has been the most popular issue in recent elections, just as "Leave no child behind" was the most widely quoted slogan of the 2000 campaign. Displayable children have become an almost mandatory prop for a successful candidate. Child tax credits are the most popular form of tax reduction. During the past decade any number of organizations, ranging from the Presbyterian Church to the state of South Carolina, have proclaimed various twelve-month periods the Year of the Child. Walt Disney World is America's most popular tourist destination. "Adult language" now means profanity; an adult community is a housing development for the aged. When a singles group demanded during the 2000 presidential campaign that government and other institutions pay more attention to the needs of childless grown-ups, they were ridiculed in the press and ignored by candidates.

One strong criticism of the childfree position came from Amitai Etzioni, a well known social theorist who is the leading figure in the communitarian movement. Writing in *USA Today*, Etzioni declared: "One may be tempted to treat this attempt to imitate social movements that address serious social grievances as a poor joke. However, growing work pressures and the high costs of raising children already discourage many people from having children. Middle-class people are getting married later and are having fewer children as it is." Etzioni saw the declining birthrate as a threat to the whole society's future economic well-being, and he recommended that rather than cut back on what he described as "the meager benefits our society does provide parents," we should consider imitating France by offering bonuses to encourage Americans to

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have more children. Like most cheerleaders for childbearing, Etzioni emphasized that the benefits to society were not his primary motive. Few people have children out of a sense of civic duty. "As the childless by choice have doubtless heard before," this father of five declared, "the reason children are recommended—whether homemade or adopted—is that most of them turn out to be an unmatchable source of profound joy and deep pride. . . . Quite simply, I am sorry for those who swear off children."

Etzioni is a writer whom I respect and often agree with on other issues. By no stretch of the ideological imagination can he be described as a family-values traditionalist, let alone an ogre of the religious right. If a mainstream, moderate thinker writes this way, where are those who decide against becoming parents to look for moral support? And Etzioni's attitude is by no means unusual. Even on university faculties, people with children frequently still explain to any childless friend over the age of twenty-five, with a varying mixture of envy, flattery, and reproach, that not having children is selfish; that someone as smart as you are should pass his genes along to the future; that such a wonderful person would make an especially wonderful parent; that a clinic could probably help. . . . As in other professions, the prevailing model today is having it all even if it means that the parents never sleep and the kids spend their early lives in day care. Female graduate students in my classes worry loudly and seriously about when the best time would be to "start a family." Before or after the Ph.D.? After or before tenure? But you might be forty by then.

The biological clock seems immune to deconstruction. That clock's peremptory ticking, like mortality itself, seems to be one of those rhythms that unite the generations rather than divide them. Alarmist media stories on childless professional couples alternate with inspirational features about gentle, enlightened fathers who stay home to change the diapers while their wives earn millions as trial lawyers or investment bankers. The willed-childlessness alternative may be easier in some ways than it was thirty years ago, but its status in most quarters is much closer to uneasy tolerance than full acceptance.

Why we do or don't have children, now that most of us have a choice, is one of the most fascinating questions anyone can ask about human nature. To write on it is to write about oneself, whether overtly or by implication. In fifty-nine years of life I've changed my mind about a great many things, but becoming a father was not one of them. Maybe it was the result of being the oldest of four sons and having my fill of babies early in life. Or maybe not; many eldest children of large families happily rear happy children of their own. In any event, I can recall shyly confiding to my father long before puberty that I thought I would probably not choose to be a parent myself. His response was that when I

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grew older, I would want to perform the activity that led to the birth of children, and life would take its natural course. I doubted the last part. There was no single issue that led me at an early age to such an independent decision, certainly not a dislike of children, but I already felt sure that having them was for other people.

Among my own parents' closest friends were a brilliant and entertaining couple. The man, a sociologist, had been my father's student at Cornell a decade earlier. When I asked my mother—even more shyly this time—some years after their marriage when they were going to have children, she shook her head and answered that she was afraid they never would. They liked their freedom too much. Although the man was subordinate to my father at the National Institutes of Health, the couple inhabited a cavernous eighteenth-century house in Georgetown instead of, like us, a suburban three-bedroom in Bethesda. They had no need to worry about local schools or playgrounds. They took trips to New York whenever they wanted, and occasionally to Europe. They frequently ate in restaurants. After a few years the woman decided to go to law school. This couple, whose way of life seemed so self-indulgent and immature to my parents, quickly became my closest adult friends and marital ideal.

College was an altogether different experience. There, virtually all my friends of both sexes, regardless of career ambitions, looked forward to parenthood as a matter of course. At the age of twenty I was a naively romantic youth who believed in commitment, devotion, marriage—in other words, with one exception I was utterly conventional when it came to personal life. The exception, which seemed a small thing at the time, was merely the conviction that love and marriage were logically as well as practically separable from parenthood. By the time I graduated, the birth-control pill had come on the market. Two people who were well matched could find a plethora of interesting ways to occupy their time; they had no need for a third or a fourth or a fifth person. I never doubted that children could be a joy and satisfaction to parents who welcomed them into the world with enthusiasm, but my tastes were different. There was certainly no public reason or duty to replace oneself. In 1964 it was already plain that the world was never likely to suffer from underpopulation.

Getting married prematurely to a bright, lovable fellow student on the assumption that one of us would change our mind over the course of time was an almost inevitable mistake. *Eventually* has a way of becoming *soon*; *soon* eventually becomes *now*. Because it was not a subject on which I had ever experienced inner conflict, I thought very little about the matter until the woman in question began to hear her biological clock ticking louder and more resentfully with every passing year.

I was sadder, wiser, and luckier a decade later when I met the fourth daughter of a Latin teacher and a retired Navy officer. Although we

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found ourselves in instant accord on the question of parenthood—together with strong feelings about fidelity in the Age of Aquarius, that was one of the early bonds of temperament between us—our own parents could never quite believe it. Each of them had conscientiously reared four apparently sound, healthy offspring and ended up with only three grandchildren. Half their children never reproduced at all. When my mother, by now an urbane feminist who lived in Berkeley, California, got together with my conservative Southern mother-in-law, the one issue on which *they* were in perfect accord was the unfairness of having gone to so much trouble for such a meager return.

My oldest brother died of cancer in his mid-forties, leaving a widow and a son of eight. In the long aftermath, my wife and I happily assumed responsibility for our nephew two or three times a year and gave his mother a break from single parenthood. We did most of the predictable things—took him to restaurants and museums, played baseball, read to him until he got too old, indulged his tastes in food and television, assembled a fiendishly complicated model of Fenway Park, explained the defects of the two-party system, talked to him about his father, made sure he went to bed on time. For days or weeks at a stretch it was a delight to become the quasi-parents of a lively, brainy, exceptionally well-mannered kid, after which we were ready to return him to the everyday responsibility of his mother. As he approached college age, the routine evolved into something solider—less a matter of substituting for someone who has been lost than a bond among people who share indelible memories, interests, and affections.

A lesson the childfree learn early in adult life is that when a friend or sibling asks accusingly why you haven't had children yet, there is only one effective answer. "If I could be sure of getting one just like yours, I'd do it in a minute" is guaranteed to deflect the attack and change the subject. Most people prefer flattery to imitation. Alas, it seldom works with your own parents. On one occasion my father, always an outspoken man, took my wife aside and blurted experimentally, "Chris should have given you a child." To which she responded: "I would have given it right back." My parents never raised the question again, but after Nancy and I had been married twenty years, my mother-in-law was still asking her youngest daughter when she planned to start having a family.

While some men hear biological clocks too, the overwhelming majority of writers on childlessness are women. But it would be a mistake to assume that women who write on the subject, even those who are liberals and feminists, necessarily support the "childfree" position, or for that matter understand it. They may instead, like Stephanie Mencimer, an editor of *Washington Monthly*, complain that women are having fewer children because of the limited government benefits to which Etzioni

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alluded. In "The Baby Boycott," Mencimer sneers at the possibility that some women might feel liberated by the prospect of not having children. (What men feel about it is not among her concerns.) "The idea that mass childlessness is the product of a 'lifestyle choice' or a political movement defies common sense. We are, after all, highly evolved primates. Reproductive instincts are hard wired in our brains, and historically, only events of serious magnitude—wars, depressions, famine, and seismic shifts in the economic system, such as the industrial revolution—have caused large numbers of women to forgo having children."

While conceding that a lower birthrate may be good for the environment, she announces: "America's disappearing children are the canaries in our coal mines, a warning that our social and economic system is seriously out of whack." What women typically want, says Mencimer, echoing many other feminists, is both careers and children. Any situation that denies them either is oppressive. The solution is to imitate Sweden, which experienced declining fertility rates and the prospect of a labor shortage in the early 1980s. "Rather than try coercive measures to increase birth rates (like banning abortion or restricting women's educational options) or massive immigration, Sweden chose to make the workplace more accommodating for parents. Swedish women are now guaranteed a year of paid leave after having a baby, the right to work six-hour days with full benefits until their child is in grade school, and subsidized child care." The result is that the birthrate in Sweden rose, though ironically only to the current American level. American women, Mencimer thinks, should put their foot down, so to speak, and refuse to have any babies at all until similar policies are enacted here. Once that happens, men and women alike will return cheerfully to the instinctual pleasures of multiple progeny.

Given this sort of commentary from quarters that might be expected to show sympathy, it is hardly astonishing that the tone of "childfree" publications and Internet sites tends toward extreme defensiveness. Such recent books as Madelyn Cain's *The Childless Revolution* and Laura Carroll's *Families of Two* argue passionately, as their titles suggest, that not having children is quite all right, indeed has become a major trend. Susan Jeffers's evocatively named *I'm Okay, You're a Brat* describes the burdens of being a parent in terms calculated to discourage all but the most determined. Childlessness seems an even more embattled cause on the Web, where its defenders huddle together for comfort and carry on what seem in many cases to be arguments begun long ago with their parents. The sixty-six sites currently listed on the Web's ChildFree Ring constitute an electronic support group with such titles as "No Kidding," "Free at Last," and "Childfree—It's a Choice."

Childfree Families, an advocacy organization whose motto is "You *always* have a choice," announces on its site: "There's an enormous pres-

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sure in America to follow a presumed 'typical' path: grow up, get married, and have children. The problem is, not all people really have an interest in having children, and many people realize that they're not well-suited to parenting. We feel that the choice not to have children is and should be a legitimate and respected choice." Under its "mission" statement, Childfree Families repeats the same point even more forcefully: "There's a website for the childfree because there's a need to get the word out: you do not have to have children. You do not have to want children. You don't. And it's perfectly OK." This slightly desperate, coming-out-of-the-closet tone finds an echo at Childfree.net, which makes the same point: "Why a website? Because being childfree-by-choice is rather frowned upon by our kidcentric society, finding information (or links to information) is difficult. . . . We feel like freaks and don't realize exactly how many of us and exactly how much information is out there."

Childfree, a site belonging to a Missouri woman who has been married for ten years and is pursuing a graduate degree in sociology, goes into more detail: "Regardless of how you come to decide not to have children, you are likely to be thought selfish and immature by many of your friends and family. Perhaps we are a little selfish. But many of those people who think we are selfish simply cannot (or will not) accept our position. They are too entrenched in the pronatalism of our society to see anything else. And they are so vocal, sometimes we cannot hear the voices more like our own." The proprietor of Perspective on Children, an Illinois man in his mid-thirties, is seeking a born-again Christian woman to marry who "must be willing to never have or raise children." "It is not surprising," he adds philosophically, "that, as of this writing, I am alone."

Some of these authors clearly loathe children. Others take pleasure in nieces, nephews, and the children of friends. But they all feel estranged from what they perceive as a child-centered society. Perhaps the most abjectly beleaguered childfree site belongs to the British Organisation of Non-parents. For reasons that are obscure, Britain, one of the most densely populated countries in the world, seems even more intolerant of intentional childlessness than the comparatively wide-open United States. Anticipating scorn and abuse, the Web site opens with a preemptive strike: "BON is not a bunch of selfish, feckless, child-hating sociopaths, but simply a group of people from all kinds of backgrounds and all walks of life who have decided for various reasons that we do not want children, and who believe that that *choice* should be ours, and anyone else's, to make, free of any stigma, prejudice or pressure from other people." As if this declaration were not sufficiently disarming, the site goes on: "We do not claim that either non-parents or parents are in any way 'better' than the other or any more or less selfish, but we do wish to see non-parents accepted as *different but equal.*" In one more display of live-and-let-live

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good faith, BON announces up front that its adherents have no objection to paying taxes to subsidize family benefits and social services for other people's children.

Although the Bible presents childbearing as part of God's punishment for the sin of Eve, literature offers few encouraging models for the non-celibate childfree. The best-known childless couple in English literature are the Macbeths. Moreover, unless one counts stepmothers, uncles without children of their own win the prize for the most unappealing fictional relatives. Many are outright villains—consider Hamlet's uncle Claudius or the most notorious uncle of them all, Ebenezer Scrooge. Others are simply ineffectual, usually with a comical hint of sexlessness: Dickens's Uncle Pumblechook; Maupassant's Uncle Jules; Faulkner's Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, unworldly indistinguishable bachelors, one of whom marries late against his will and produces an even more helpless son, Ike McCaslin, who in turn becomes "uncle to half a county and father to no one." Aunts fare a little better—a self-respecting woman could probably tolerate being compared with Auntie Mame, or at a later age with David Copperfield's Aunt Betsy Trotwood. On the other hand, Fanny Price's Aunt Norris, in *Mansfield Park*, is the most unambiguously evil character in all the novels of Jane Austen, a writer who notoriously did not care for children.

Choosing not to become a parent means refusing to do something that each of one's ancestors has done all the way back to the invention of sexual reproduction. An elderly Englishwoman who is a dear friend of mine thinks any woman who passes up having children is "against life" (adding in the next breath that a man who never fights in a war has likewise missed out on his destiny). Taking this step as an act of will still requires determination, and not only for women. One is both violating unanimous family tradition and resisting a clear if mostly unvoiced consensus in contemporary society, however secular and liberated the immediate environment may be. An almost unchallenged emphasis on children and family is by no means confined to the bromides of politics and religion. Since the 1960s, in the toyland of popular culture, the tastes, interests, and clothing styles of children and adolescents have become norms for anyone who wants to avoid seeming antisocial or over the hill.

Why does a society whose members have so many opportunities continue to place such emphasis on reproduction and its fruits? The British sociobiologist Richard Dawkins maintains that human beings, like other organisms, are simply mechanisms contrived by genes to replicate themselves. For the "selfish gene," success in life means producing as many surviving offspring as possible. According to this theory, we are indeed hardwired to have children. Few social scientists accept this kind of all-or-nothing evolutionary explanation for human behavior. At the same time,

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few have studied parents' reasons for having children in much depth, perhaps because other explanations usually end up being speculative, vague, or both.

A 1997 article by Robert Schoen et al. titled "Why Do Americans Want Children?" examined the professional literature on the subject and noted gloomily that "there is no explanation for why Americans still want children." Looked at from the purely economic standpoint, the benefits that children provided in an agricultural society "virtually disappear" with the transition to an industrial and post-industrial world. After pointing out that "intended childlessness is still uncommon," however, the study's authors could do no better than to conclude: "Childbearing is purposeful behavior that creates and reinforces the most important and most enduring social bonds. We find that children are not seen as consumer durables; they are seen as the threads from which the tapestry of life is woven."

What really needs explaining, according to most researchers, is why a minority deviates from the norm by choosing *not* to become parents. If Etzioni's and Mencimer's conclusions seem farfetched—after all, the birthrate was at its highest during periods when virtually no government benefits existed for parents or children—others are available, most of them economic. One familiar theory holds that the higher a woman's educational attainment and potential earnings, the greater the "opportunity cost" of having children. By the same token, however, affluent families can afford children more easily than poorer ones, so that the two effects mostly cancel each other out. The more education a woman has, the later she is likely to start bearing children and the fewer she is likely to have, though women's career goals in themselves seem to lack much impact on decisions about having children.

At bottom, according to a 1999 article by Tim Heaton et al., "Persistence and Change in Decisions to Remain Childless," "the relationship between socioeconomic characteristics and childlessness is not strong." Probably to no one's surprise, "Why Do Americans Want Children?" concludes that "childbearing is most likely to occur among traditional homemakers and happily married couples." Black Americans are more likely to have children than whites, to have them earlier, and to have them out of wedlock. Most significantly, maybe, the 1999 study found that "the decision about childbearing appears to be less firm than in previous generations. . . . Few early childbearing intentions appear to be hard and firm." One factor that seems to harden them, ironically, is war. In the wake of September 11, 2001, *New York* magazine published an article called "Baby Talk," which quotes a string of women in their twenties and thirties who suddenly can't wait to have children. "I know three people who told me they wanted to conceive on the day of the attacks," says one. "I totally felt a deep, primal need." Another adds: "After it happened, all those families were out walking around and it made me realize how much I wanted to

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reproduce. I told my fiancé, 'I'm having *major* baby pangs.'" No one who remembers that the baby boom immediately followed World War II should be surprised.

In a few months I plan to attend the wedding of one of my favorite graduate students and his girlfriend, who is finishing her own Ph.D. in industrial engineering. He is thirty, she twenty-six. Without quite being sure why, they decided long ago not to have children. As the wedding approaches they feel pressure to change their minds, not only from their Catholic parents but from some of their closest contemporaries. They were the main inspiration for this essay, and they would like to see it end with an impassioned statement of the arguments for their position—overpopulation, the environment, and, above all, the right of adults to choose their destinies free from the prejudices of the tribe. Yet there is hardly any issue on which argument is more futile. The motivations on both sides are too deep and obscure. What I would prefer to say to them instead, therefore, goes something like this:

Having or not having children is one of the momentous, irrevocable choices of human life, and those who know from an early age which alternative will make them happier are extremely fortunate. No doubt economic and demographic explanations for fluctuations in the birthrate have a certain statistical validity. They neatly account for its fall during the Depression and, to a lesser extent, during recent decades, when so many women have been pursuing careers. But on the basic question of whether to reproduce, they seem hopelessly shallow. Most people fundamentally want to have children and do, almost regardless of circumstances, while a significant minority prefers not to and sees no good reason why it should. Though they may share the same house, each finds the other a mystery. Not everyone is wired the same way.

But why should we be? In ethical terms, neither alternative is inherently less or more selfish than the other; the one altruistic course would be to adopt a child who has no home. The only adults who deserve special sympathy in this intimate civil war are the undecided, the wavering, the conflicted, who depressingly often either jump too soon into parenthood or leave it until too late, regretting in the end whichever choice they finally made.

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Uncertainty Principle

RICHARD LEHNERT

Outside this window a firethorn, one branch
of small blunt leaves and orange pomes
bent under a cap of spongy snow
twice half-melted, now mostly ice.

Sometime soon, not this gray day,
that ice will sweat and slide,
the branch swing up with a small sound
if ears are there to hear; I won't see it

seem to shake itself free, sway lighter,
more finely tuned to any breeze.
Now atop the long-barbed arc a finch
wraps fleshless feet around the shaft,

stands her small body there, pulled down,
lifted by the branch whose sag and heave
she gave it. Only her head is fixed, spiked
by her beak to one tight crack in air.

My pen hand slides; she sees, crouches,
then lets fly herself. Snow and ice scab off
the branch as soundlessly through glass
the firethorn flings up bright fruit,

shivers itself almost straight
and never quite stops swaying
in a breeze I neither see nor feel,
can only assume blows steady, cold.

Richard Lehnert, a freelance copy editor, is the author of *Grief Needs a Body*. His work has appeared in many magazines, including *Spoon River Review*, *The Southern Review*, and *Barrow Street*.

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Obelisks and Empires of the Mind

ANTHONY GRAFTON

Between spring and fall 1586, the blasé inhabitants of Rome were dazzled by the greatest media event—and one of the greatest technological feats—of the sixteenth century. Sixtus V, a terrifying pope who rerouted the city's streets, restored its public water supply, and even tried to expel its notorious courtesans, began his pontificate with the most daring of all his projects. He set out to move the great Egyptian obelisk that had stood for centuries by the old basilica of St. Peter's to the piazza in front of the new church. No one expected the project to be simple: in October 1585, Guido Gualtieri, one of Sixtus's secretaries, noted in his diary that "the task is clearly immensely hard, and though some popes had previously envisioned it, the difficulty of the matter frightened them off, and they did not dare to attempt it." After hot competition, the architect Domenico Fontana received the commission to carry out this challenging project. Denuding the Campagna of its great oaks, breaking through the wall of old St. Peter's to clear the way, he built a fabulously complex array of frames and scaffolds in order to move the stone without breaking it—the frightening possibility that Michelangelo had cited when refusing to undertake the task some decades before. Several hundred men and seventy-five to eighty horses turned forty capstans as the obelisk,

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cradled in wood and iron, was raised a little, gently lowered to horizontal position, rolled to its new place in the Piazza San Pietro, and finally, in mid-September, raised again.

The transport involved more than state-of-the-art engineering. Sixtus and Fontana staged it as a solemn public ritual. A papal ordinance forbade the onlookers who crowded the windows and roofs of neighboring buildings and thronged the piazza itself to speak or even to spit while Fontana and his men worked—on pain of death. After the obelisk was raised, in solemn silence, a bishop baptized it with holy water. He formally exorcised the evil spirits that had once inhabited the stone. A deacon then replaced a metal ball, which had crowned the obelisk since antiquity, with a cross. This made clear the great shaft's new allegiance to the Christian god. So did the splendid new inscriptions, carved in newly designed capital letters, which proclaimed that this idol, erected long ago in Egypt for the worship of devils, had been newly consecrated to the service of the Christian god: "Behold the cross of the Lord. Enemies, flee. The lion of the tribe of Judah has conquered." All those who watched the statue being exorcised received an indulgence for fifteen years, and all those who bared their heads and prayed when they passed it received one for five years. The soaring, tapering shaft, eighty-three feet high, would eventually become the centerpiece for Bernini's colonnaded piazza. Period images represent it as far higher than it really was, dominating even Michelangelo's church behind it. They give a sense of the overwhelming impression the shaft made on every pilgrim, tourist, ambassador, or monarch who came to visit the citadel of the Roman church.

A paradox begins to emerge. Sixtus V ranked with the fiercest of the Counter-Reformation popes. What mattered most to him about the history of Rome was not its classical but its Christian ruins; and what mattered most to him about the city was not its past but its present. By straightening and widening the streets that connected Rome's basilicas and placing obelisks near them as highly visible markers, he hoped to create a spectacular stage for the public pageants of the Counter-Reformation. When he decided to move the Vatican obelisk, he had already ordered that statues of Saints Peter and Paul should be placed on top of the columns of Trajan and Antoninus, and that the "statues of ancient idols" should be removed from the Capitoline Museum, founded by his forerunner and namesake, Sixtus IV, just over a century before. Gualtieri, in fact, believed that Sixtus would succeed in moving the obelisk where others had lost courage and failed, precisely because doing so formed only part of a conscious campaign "to expunge all memory of ancient idolatry." Why then, one wonders, did Sixtus place—of all things—an Egyptian obelisk at the center of his Holy City? And why did he erect three more by the other great basilicas of the city?

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The obelisk meant many things to Sixtus and his advisers. At the most obvious level, it stood for the power of the ancient Romans. The whole idea of placing a single obelisk at the center of a great public complex came not from Egypt but from the great rulers of the Hellenistic and Roman world; and the ability to do so seems to have mattered greatly to them. In ancient Egypt, obelisks—which began to be made as early as the beginning of the third millennium B.C.—normally stood in pairs at the gates of temple precincts, as mute stone guards bearing triumphant inscriptions. From Alexander the Great onward, however, the Greek and Roman conquerors of Egypt found new uses for them. The obelisk that now stands in the Piazza San Pietro came originally from the sacred city of Heliopolis, not far from modern Cairo. Cleopatra—so a distinguished ancient historian has argued—moved it to Alexandria and set it up in the center of a great forum, as a monument to her lover Mark Antony. But the Roman governor of Egypt, Cornelius Gallus, rededicated it to Augustus and his heir Tiberius, with metal letters that fell off the obelisk millennia ago. (Only recently have archaeologists reconstructed Gallus's inscriptions, using the holes left by the letters to recreate their long-lost wording.)

It seems highly likely that Augustus ordered this change. He transported other obelisks to Rome, regardless of the effort and expense required. One of them he used as a meridian instrument, an enormous gnomon that traced the movement of the sun, on the Campus Martius. It highlighted the power that Augustus, a calendar reformer, claimed over the year and its seasons. Two more would guard his tomb. But even Augustus's power could not endow what became the Vatican obelisk with a fixed, stable meaning. The mad emperor Caligula had it brought from Alexandria to Rome and placed it at the center of his circus—with the inscriptions carefully turned so that the audience could not read them. There it stood until 1586, a silent witness not only to the rise of the Roman empire but to the deaths of thousands of Christian martyrs.

When Sixtus moved the obelisk, he claimed his own place in the succession of great Roman rulers—one that included not only the virtuous if pagan Augustus, but also the even more virtuous Christian convert Constantine the Great, who transported an obelisk from Alexandria to the heart of the new Rome that he founded at Byzantium. He moved what had become a strange sort of relic—a pagan monument soaked with Christian blood—to the central and prominent place it deserved in Christian Rome. By mustering the men and machines needed to carry out the deed, moreover, Sixtus proved something that mattered even more to him than his personal fate: the triumphant Roman church that he led had become as powerful, and as universal, as the Roman Empire at its ancient height. Everyone who leafed through the magnificent album of illustrations that Fontana published to record his feat, or who visited

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Rome with a guidebook in hand, learned to read the obelisk and its inscriptions as a single complex text—one that recorded, as powerfully as the fallen statue of Ozymandias, the fates of earthly empires.

This imperious gesture has sparked numerous imitations in more recent centuries—though most of those who have emulated Sixtus have done so to enhance the prestige of earthly, not celestial, kingdoms. Sixtus himself set up four more obelisks in Rome. Baroque and Enlightenment rulers, unable to quarry obelisks in Egypt itself, transported, repaired, and re-erected Roman ones—or created their own imaginative versions of them. In the course of the nineteenth century, the new empires of the West attained a more than Roman level of supremacy over the rest of the world. Naturally, they felt the need for obelisks. First the French, then the English, and finally the Americans transported obelisks from Luxor and Alexandria to their capitals, where they set them up in public spaces. The elaborate feats of naval engineering by which Commander Henry Gorringe moved Cleopatra's Needle from Alexandria to New York cost more than the obelisk itself—William H. Vanderbilt paid for both—and represented as great a triumph of American ingenuity and technology as Fontana's feats had of North Italian engineering. Many obelisks were raised, from the temporary ones created to celebrate the entry of kings into Renaissance Lyon and Paris to the Bunker Hill and Washington monuments, though few tried to revive the Egyptian way of making them from a single stone. The soaring shafts that recorded the power of Roman emperors and served as rallying points for Catholic processions could also celebrate the new power and cosmopolitanism of the imperial capitals on the Seine, the Thames, and the Potomac.

Obelisks had deeper meanings as well. The ancient Egyptians—so a number of texts, both Christian and pagan, asserted—had been the masters of occult knowledge, expert practitioners of magic, astrology, and alchemy. These "barbarians"—like the "barbarous" Indian gymnosophists, or Brahmans, and followers of Zoroaster—had observed the stars in their courses and developed powers over natural objects and the human body long before the Greeks and Romans. Obelisks seemed to bear out this claim, and in more than one way. Their tapering square shafts, hewn and moved by unknown techniques, proved the Egyptians' mastery of nature. So did the mysterious hieroglyphic inscriptions carved into many of them (though not the one before the Vatican). So, above all, did their form—which clearly represented, as Roman writers pointed out, the rays of the sun, to whose god they had been dedicated. These great stone pillars documented not only the succession of empires, but also the creation—and the destruction—of religion, technology, and magic. Even Sixtus V could only transport obelisks from place to place, not craft them himself—as he confessed with admiration to the Danish

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savant Heinrich von Rantzau, who decorated his estates in Schleswig-Holstein with obelisks of his own manufacture.

Throughout the Middle Ages, legends evoked the mysterious qualities of the obelisks and their makers—even if their identity became more and more obscure. Roman tour guides explained that Virgil—a necromancer as well as a poet—had brought the Vatican obelisk to Rome from Jerusalem, where it had formed part of Solomon's Temple. And in the Renaissance, when scholars began to study Egyptian hieroglyphs and to read Greek texts ascribed to Egyptian authors, the nature and aesthetic qualities of the obelisks fascinated many. Engineers and architects scrutinized the Vatican obelisk, chipping away at its granite surface in the hope of understanding how it had been made (and determining if, as one legend held, it was really hollow). All of them—even relatively sober souls like Michele Mercati, the keeper of Sixtus's collections of jewels and other metals—believed that when they examined the obelisks, they confronted the creations of an ancient elite of wise priests. Sixtus himself allowed Fontana to celebrate him as a "thrice-great" pope—in clear allusion to Hermes Trismegistus, "thrice-great Hermes," the supposed author of a set of Greek and Latin texts about ancient Egypt and its beliefs, parts of which derived from genuine Egyptian originals.

Yet Sixtus feared, as well as admired, the wisdom of the Egyptians—as is clear from the rituals with which he made the obelisk a good Christian monument. No wonder that only a few years later, when Giordano Bruno tried to revive the religion and philosophy of ancient Egypt, the authorities had him burnt to death in another of Rome's great public spaces, the Campo de' Fiori. The Egyptian wisdom that had brought the obelisks into being seemed to threaten the preeminence of the Christian revelation—and would continue to do so in later centuries, when obelisks in Vienna and elsewhere evoked the philanthropic beliefs of Freemasons.

The obelisks in Rome and elsewhere, accordingly, became not only political but intellectual palimpsests—records of ancient and modern cultural achievements, and their conflicts. Their towering form, the inscriptions on their sides, the machines needed to move them—all spoke, telling stories about the tides in human affairs. Over the centuries, most of them fell, and many broke, to lie for centuries covered by Egyptian or Italian earth. Those who resurrected them did so, of course, for their own ends, not those of their creators—and those who removed obelisks from Egypt, in the nineteenth century, aroused many Egyptians to fierce anger. But no one—not in antiquity, not in the Middle Ages, not in the Renaissance—seems to have destroyed an obelisk for the sheer joy of destruction. Even a rigorous reformer like Sixtus V, bent on returning the Church to its first principles, tried not to demolish, but to reorient, these soaring symbols of divine nature and human aspiration.

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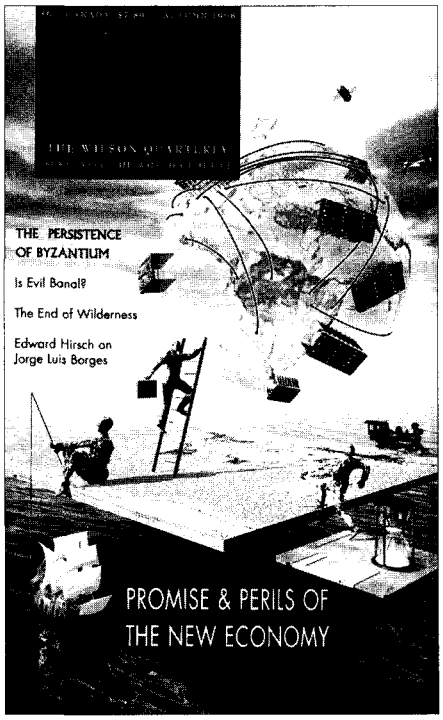

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

Grief and Reflection

SHERWIN B. NULAND

Ten days after: Faced with the anguish of so many who have been directly touched by our national tragedy, we seek means to unite ourselves with them. We scan the lengthening lists of those who have died, and feel intense relief to find that we know not a single person; and yet something in us insistently whispers the tiniest sigh of regret that no familiar name appears. Psychiatrists are quoted in the papers about this troubling phenomenon, and they assuage our guilt by telling us that such thoughts have to do with our need to express solidarity with the dead and those who have loved them.

But we suspect that something else is afoot. We recognize it from our experience of funerals we have attended over the years. It is that small voice in each of us that expresses the hunger for belonging and even for stature by proclaiming, "*I, too,* am suffering—*I, too,* have been affected by this tragedy—Don't leave *me* out." Or perhaps only, "*I* comprehend, *I* understand, *I* can feel the magnitude of this sadness." Joining in another's sorrow gratifies, validates, the insistent demands of that voice. This, too, may be a means of expressing solidarity. But perhaps it expresses narcissism as well. And so what?

Physicians whose specialties bring them into frequent contact with terminal patients and their circle of kith and kin are familiar with such feelings, because they are commonly manifested in the hours and days after a life has ended. And we are familiar with other unwelcome emotions, too, whether they are the well-publicized survivors' guilt of people who have narrowly missed death, or the *schadenfreude* about which we feel such shame when we recognize it in ourselves. These are patterns that for the most part affect only those who have had a close relationship with the dead. But we are now an entire nation of distant mourners, and the full range of human response is showing itself, though most of it is unspoken and even unacknowledged. In the coming sad months, many Americans will find themselves unprepared for their own (often conflicting) responses to the enormity of our nation's loss of life.

Grieving is an indescribably complex phenomenon. Even the grieving-at-a-distance that most of us have been experiencing is such a mix of cultural, experiential, and genetically determined variables in each individual that its totality eludes the most sensitive perceptions of the most sensitive observers, and sometimes of the most skilled, too. Some responses that would seem reprehensible or aberrant are so common that they fall into the necessarily wide category called "normal." It is probably safe to say that only when symptoms are extreme, or refuse to ebb at a reasonable time, should they be considered pathological. Until that time—and who can with certainty declare its duration?—they are not in fact symptoms, for that word carries with it the connotation of sickness. And who is to say, beyond certain obviously bizarre behaviors, what is extreme? The group of professionals who deal with such matters would do well to avoid calling themselves "grief therapists." With only rare exceptions, they are not treating sick people. They are counselors, not therapists, and I wish there were more of them. Then the varieties of mourning response might be more widely understood, and the mourners might be kinder to themselves.

We all know that mourning does recede, but far too few of us understand that it never ends. Certain stars disappear from our personal firmament once we have sustained a loss, no matter how remote that loss may be from the

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rhythm of our own daily concerns. Life resumes somewhat changed. When journalists and our leaders tell us in the immediate aftermath of the unutterable events of September 11 that our nation will never be the same, they are only stating a universal truth that applies to every loss in the life of every individual. But that truth is now magnified by hundreds of millions who mourn, and it has become international in magnitude. Those who in the past have blathered about something they call "closure" must surely by now know that there is no such thing. We try to achieve a measure of acceptance to help us with the reality of loss, but even that is rarely complete. All of this must be taken into account in the calculus of what it means to be human.

When this column first appeared in these pages four years ago, I explained why I had chosen to call it—and in the process, call medicine too—"The Uncertain Art." After the most horrendous single catastrophe in our nation's history, few would deny that life itself is the source of our greatest uncertainty. Just as the philosophical underpinnings of medicine reflect the culture of the society it serves, the art of medicine reflects the reality of everything going on around it. Medicine is uncertain, life is uncertain, and the boundaries of grief are uncertain. We must allow grief to proceed as it will.

Ruminating on the less attractive features of our own grief is far more harmful to us than those features themselves. When we turn inward, it should be to reflect, and not to be obsessed by guilt over the unwelcome thoughts that flow so readily into our minds. To become isolated in one's own sadness is to be deprived of the consolations that come with shared loss. Prayer services, wakes, *shiva*, communal vigils, the formalized nature of the funeral itself, the rituals and customs of the first period after a death—all these construct the edifice that society and organized religion have provided to enable us not only to express our sorrow but also to turn outward in order to do so.

And then there is the matter of carrying on. In the aftermath of September 11, the airwaves were flooded with exhortations for us to return to normalcy as soon as possible. If we hesitated, we were told, the vicious perpetrators of this outrage against morality would achieve their objective. The smoothest path to recovery from grief was to be found in the minutiae and hurly-burly of daily life; restoring them should be our objective if we were to heal and if we were to frustrate the designs of those who would terrorize us into fear and inaction.

We were glad to hear such exhortations. When we return to the mundane without public sanction, it is too often with twinges of guilt for resuming our daily lives instead of lingering in sadness, out of loyalty to the dead and concern about the tragic events we have witnessed. Like good parents, the spokesmen for our culture's values urged us to face again the everyday challenges of our lives. Because they allowed us to turn in the direction to which our recuperating minds inclined, we did so less burdened by regret than we might otherwise have been.

In fact, we hardly needed such admonitions. Of course we would carry on. What else could we do? The human psyche will heal itself if the trauma is not repeatedly inflicted. It responds precisely the way injured flesh responds, and that includes the scar that is the constant reminder of what was endured. The scar tells us, among its other messages, that we are changed, both on the surface, where it is visible, and in deeper regions, where it is not. When we return to that familiar hurly-burly, we return with a new perspective. And this, too, must be accepted. It is impossible to accept the loss completely; it is difficult to accept some of the unpalatable thoughts that assail us while mourning; but it is both easy and strengthening to accept the change that such a tragedy has wrought, especially if it makes us more self-aware and grateful for life, for the personal liberties we have heretofore taken for granted, and for the brotherhood of this great nation.

At this moment still so close to the hour of tragedy, we think of the months ahead and of how we will maintain the resolve, personal and national, that now comes so easily. Those of us who have been able to give little more than some money and some blood may, just by being reflective, be able to contribute something of consequence to the national

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good. Although we may applaud much of what we are hearing today of our government's planned response, a rush to action sometimes gets in the way of our taking the time to be with ourselves and to remember the eternal values that have sculpted the moral order and our nation. Our leaders will surely make errors in the coming months, but we can hope that they will not be errors of morality, even in their actions against those who quite obviously have none. As essential to the healing process as it is that we vent our individual and collective spleen against those who have declared us their satanic enemy; as therapeutic as it is that we cry out for justice and retribution, and achieve them; as useful as it is that we dedicate ourselves to a resumption of normalcy so effective that it frustrates the purposes of the terror—as vital to healing, security, and the continuing triumph of liberty as such responses are, they will be of no enduring value unless we also, in our reflectiveness, address the inequities that have formed the background to such unbridled rage against the values that shape our democracy.

Religious freedom, individual liberty, and the unrestrained privilege of pursuing knowledge and commerce have made Western and Westernized nations the most prosperous, intellectually advanced, and healthy societies the world has ever known. And far greater advances are sure to come. The principles of democracy have brought benefits to the public health that were unimaginable a century ago. This is not true for those who are attempting to destroy our lives and our system of government. The misguided zealots who would bring us to our knees represent a philosophy meant to appeal to people left behind in the extraordinary advances of our time. Poverty, disease, constrained life expectancy, and utter lack of opportunity to affect grim prospects have fostered the resentment that dismantles moral values, perverts religious doctrine, and fuels the flames with which the unenfranchised would immolate us. A self-righteous fury becomes the mood of an entire deprived culture, and its basis is despair. It is despair that is our enemy, not people.

Once we have dealt with the leaders who turn despair to their own ends, we must attend to the despair itself, and to the contempt for the value of human life from which it springs. We can best do that by treating it as we would treat an illness, for it is indeed a sickness of the soul. In an earlier column, I briefly mentioned the philosophy of the greatest pathologist of the nineteenth century, Rudolf Virchow of Berlin, who taught that disease is the product of the societal conditions in which it arises, namely poverty, ignorance, and the inattention of the affluent to the problems of the disadvantaged. A hundred years earlier, Pierre Cabanis, the eminent French medical philosopher, had written, "Sickness is dependent on the blunders of society," and called upon governments to redress the wrongs. Virchow took up the cause and urged his colleagues to change the conditions that bred sickness and unrest. "Physicians are the natural attorneys of the poor," he thundered, but his words were heeded by only a few. It is ironic that we have long recognized that the crime and misery of our inner cities is largely the result of inequality of opportunity, but we seem not to make the analogy with entire cultures. Nothing in the teachings of Islam stands in the way of the prosperity and scientific uplifting of its adherents. Witness the extraordinary accomplishments of its civilization in the centuries after it exploded out of the Arabian peninsula.

Whether they perceive it or not, the Islamic fundamentalists and those who share their desperation hate us far less for what *we* are than for what *they* are. In our own self-righteousness we should not ignore the sources of theirs. Insofar as the industrialized nations can rally together to do it, we must fulfill a neglected obligation: it is now incumbent on us as never before to recognize that we are fighting a form of disease. Answering Rudolf Virchow's call, we must become physicians to the world. Every group—whatever its religious beliefs—left behind by the benisons of the past century should become our patient, .

But there is another principle of disease and healing that must not be forgotten if our quest is to be successful, and it was articulated long before the philosophies of Cabanis and Virchow. Except when dealing with nations whose value systems we consider on a level with our own—the Marshall Plan is a case in point—Americans helping to build or rebuild another nation have too often been guilty of what so

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many of our critics justifiably call "cultural imperialism." Our intent should be to address sickness, poverty, and despair by giving direct aid and by teaching populations to be self-sufficient and to take advantage of present-day science, agriculture, and commerce. The point is not to make little Americas of them. Even the preaching of democracy should not be one of our goals. The very old principle of healing to which I refer was first articulated in the corpus of writings long attributed to Hippocrates. The author of Book I of *Epidemics* enjoins physicians in a declaration often misquoted in Latin as *primum non nocere,* but best translated from the original Greek simply as "do no harm." The harm of cultural imperialism has been incalculable, not only to nations exposed to it but to ourselves as well. It is bad enough in the eyes of the bereft that we are privileged without seeming to deserve our good fortune; but to parade arrogance about our values is an outrage.

Let us recognize and address the needs of the sufferers in other lands, and lessen the sum of human despair. Perhaps this is among the ways in which we can best express solidarity with those many adults and children whose loved ones were taken from them by the atrocities of September 11. Perhaps this is among the ways that we can honor the dead. It will not be sufficient to bring justice to their murderers or practical reparations to their survivors. We must do far more. We can add to the meaning of their lives by adding to the meaning of their deaths, if we turn our grief to reflection, and our mourning to a search for paths toward peace and security for all the peoples of the world.

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JOURNAL

Houston–Manhattan by U-Haul

THOMAS A. STEWART

I was in Houston on September 11, delivering a speech at a conference on knowledge management sponsored by the American Productivity and Quality Center. Three-quarters of the way through my talk, APQC president Carla O'Dell held up a sign for me: Wrap it up, an urgent announcement must be made.

We were stranded, of course. Far from our homes, helpless in Houston, not knowing what to do or how. We all managed to call home, then stood or sat staring, hour upon hour, as the towers of the World Trade Center collapsed again and again.

The couple of dozen military personnel at the conference began figuring out how to get back to home, which for many was Washington. Amtrak trains were booked. None of us was quick enough to score a rental car, though small companies had them available with tremendous drop-off charges. But it was becoming impossible to stay, to do nothing, to sit in a hotel bar and watch CNN, to sit in a hotel room and watch CNN, to borrow an office and watch CNN, or to try to work and not watch CNN.

Renée Marsh, whom I'd met at the conference and who works for IBM and lives just north of New York City, called her significant other to tell him that she wanted to drive home, but there wasn't a one-way rental to be found.

"Get a U-Haul," he said, adding: "But you're a damn fool."

September 12. At 10:30 this morning, Wednesday, Renée and I took a taxi to the U-Haul place on the west side of Houston and rented ourselves an eighteen-foot truck, the smallest they had. "How many rooms are you moving?" the salesperson asked when Renée called. "Oh, don't worry about that," she said. An hour later, we'd completed the paperwork, bought a road atlas at a Borders in a shopping mall, and turned our truck's chunky nose toward Interstate 610, which circumnavigates Houston. In the cargo space behind us: two small suitcases. In the cab: two briefcases containing laptops, and a nylon bag containing half a dozen bottles of water and two Diet Cokes, swiped from the setup for another conference's refreshment break at the hotel we'd just vacated.

* * *

By 8:00 tonight, we have made it to Meridian, Mississippi, 530 miles east along I-10 and I-12, then northeast on I-59. We aren't sure how many miles are left—about 1,200, it looks like. In central Louisiana, the road runs through, or over, an eerie, magnificent place—the huge Henderson Swamp—on its way to Baton Rouge, where we cross the Mississippi. We congratulate ourselves on reaching our first milestone: we are now officially in the East, and heading for the Northeast. We're tuned to National Public Radio; every few hours, whoever is riding shotgun has to fiddle with the dial, as we drive out of range of one affiliate and into range of another. The road goes just north of Covington, and only a few miles from forty scraggly acres of pine forest owned partly by my mother and me. My grandfather and his best friend bought it years ago; Henry's half is now owned by his son Kerry, who makes wine in California. In Meridian—birthplace of singer Jimmie Rodgers—we pull into a Holiday Inn, take our bags from the back of the truck, and walk up to the desk. There is no

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room in the inn, but the EconoLodge, literally next door, does have rooms, and we lug our stuff over, check in, and find a place to eat and have a drink. We agree to meet in the motel lobby at 6:00 the next morning.

September 13. I never thought I'd be driving a truck through Alabama, with the woman in the seat next to me using needle and thread to repair the broken thong of one of the flip-flops she'd just bought—she couldn't find any duct tape. But that was us this morning. We left our Mississippi EconoLodge at six and drove to Wal-Mart, on the other side of the Interstate a few hundred yards away, because Renée needed fresh clothes. (I'd washed a cotton dress shirt in the sink the night before and it had dried: I was, I am sure, the only person in America in a U-Haul truck wearing a shirt, washed in a motel sink the night before, that had been custom-made in Hong Kong.) Renée then climbed into the back of the truck and put on her new duds, in her haste breaking the thong of one of the flip-flops, and at 6:20 we hit the road and drove, drove, drove—three-hour shifts each, averaging above 60 mph, with brief breaks for gas, lunch, and a fruitless look for duct tape in a gas station's convenience mart.

Today's trip takes us almost to the northern tip of Virginia—upwards of eight hundred miles. Gorgeous drives toward Chattanooga and Knoxville—Tennessee River country, TVA country. As we come into Chattanooga, signs urge us to check out Lookout Mountain. "That must be it," Renée says, pointing to our right. I am not certain till we are looking at it from the direction of the city. Yes, there it is, looking exactly as it does in a painting of the Civil War Battle of Lookout Mountain. *American Heritage* made a jigsaw puzzle out of the painting; I had assembled it when I was a kid.

We tell stories. Renée's are better. Her father worked for a number of U.S. corporations throughout the Middle East. She spent a lot of time in Saudi Arabia, some time in Iran, getting out just before the fundamentalists took over. When he was working in Saudi, Renée's father kept pictures of his three daughters under the glass top of his desk. Once a visitor tapped his finger on one of the pictures and asked, "How much for that one?"

We keep passing outlets—shoes, furniture, clothing. "We've got room," we say, but we haven't got time. We need to be home. NPR has an interview with a rescue worker from Queens or Brooklyn, talking in a dese-and-dose accent: "New York City is the most democratic place in the world, because no one cares who you are. You can be anything you want, and nobody cares. It's all right. That makes it the center of democracy in the world. They tried to blow up democracy, and I'm going to keep digging until we bring it back out."

The Hampton Inn in Harrisonburg, Virginia, is a high-class joint: two bars of soap and a shampoo, as opposed to the EconoLodge's single bar. Costs more, too, but Renée, who keeps her head when all about her are losing theirs, has thought to ask if there's an IBM corporate discount. Around the desk, others who are driving somewhere because they can't fly. "Rochester to Atlanta, from a wedding. How about you?"

"Houston to New York."

"Oh, God—we're so sorry."

September 14. I'm behind the wheel on I-78 at about ten in the morning when we see the sign we hadn't told each other we'd been looking for:

NEW YORK CITY
135 MILES

I mustn't cry but can't help it, fight it down after a second, and we barrel on. It has been raining most of the drive, which began in Harrisonburg at 5:40 A.M. Dark when we began, then fading to gray. Low clouds are with us most of the way, mist coming up like plumes of smoke from forested mountains, trucks thundering by—wait, we *are* a truck—and drizzle turning to rain. The road takes us through Maryland for a few miles, past an exit to the site of the battle of Antietam—the cornfield, the sunken road that claimed more lives in a single day than any event in American history. Then Pennsylvania, and Renée says, "We have crossed the Mason-Dixon line." At 8:30 or so, I take the wheel. Every few miles I turn the wiper blades up a notch as we outrun the good weather coming in behind the storm that, we hear on NPR, hampered rescue and

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debris removal efforts overnight by turning dust into slippery mud. Just before we turn north onto the New Jersey Turnpike, we change drivers again—these interchanges, some of the most confusingly marked anywhere, are ones that Renée knows cold. So I am in the passenger seat a few minutes before noon, when off to our right the skyline comes into view, the Empire State Building standing slim and strong, anchoring and adding an exclamation point to the cluster of Midtown's towers. Then the low buildings of Chelsea and the Village, and then the second skyscraper stand at the foot of the island. No World Trade Center. No discernible plume of ash and dust, because what there is—and we hear there still is dust rising, despite the rain—can't be distinguished from the clouds. They are thick enough that, for all we can tell, the twin towers might even be there, just invisible behind a scrim.

They are not, of course. And the skyline, as brave and beautiful as ever—brave and beautiful and more or less as it was when I first saw it in 1965—stretches and stretches and shines with all the aspiration implicit in words like urban, urbanity, city, civility, civilization itself. I say to Renée: "One thing I really like about the skyline of San Francisco is the fact that, on the top of almost all its tall buildings, there's an American flag, and, given the way the wind comes off from the Pacific, it's always fluttering out. I think our skyline would look good with flags on every building, too, don't you?"

We stop for gas, so that the U-Haul will be returned with as much as it had when we took it out in Houston. Renée calls her significant other and makes arrangements to be met where she will drop the truck. We cross the George Washington Bridge—very macho, a $12 toll because of our truckness. Renée says ouch, and I say, yeah, but the Port Authority needs the money, and we turn up the Deegan.

We get off at Van Cortlandt Park South. I've aimed us into a wrong turn: we stop, and with the help of a pedestrian we find our way to the 1-9 subway station at 238th and Broadway—the line that used to run under the World Trade Center. The odometer tells us we've driven precisely 1,675 miles. I get out, and we open the back of the truck so I can remove my suitcase; in my other hand I have my laptop case and the empty nylon bag. I put them down. Renée and I give each other big hugs and compliments and promises that we'll get together with our partners. I start climbing the steps to the subway (which is elevated here in the Bronx) and watch the truck drive off. It is 1:35. We left Houston at 11:30 on Wednesday and lost an hour as we came into the Eastern time zone, so the trip has taken forty-nine hours.

* * *

While I wait for the train I leave a voice mail for my wife, who, I figure, is at a memorial service at church. The train is nearly empty when it arrives—this is only its second stop on the trip from the Bronx into Manhattan. It is perhaps a third full after four or five stops, and by this time it is beginning to look like home: three races, two languages, then a third, then a fourth. A woman wearing a head scarf comes on; at 116th Street, where Columbia University is, three students enter. One, a guy, starts up a conversation with the others, young women. He is reading *The Iliad* and is on his way to the Port Authority bus station to go to Philadelphia. People are standing now, and since I have bags, I get up so that I won't have to push through too many passengers when we reach 96th Street. A fit, 65ish woman thinks I am offering her my seat and seems a little hurt or perhaps huffy about it as she tells me not to. I explain that I'm getting off in a couple of stops, and once she knows I'm not doing her any favors, she sits. I get off and walk upstairs to 96th and Broadway. It's chilly. I'm wearing a polo shirt (somewhat ripe, though I washed it in the sink last night with a bar of hand soap), and I have to wait a bit in a drizzle until the bus comes to take me across town on 96th Street.

The doorman is on his lunch break, so the superintendent is manning his post. "Welcome home, Mr. Stewart!" he says.

"Thank you, Ahmad," I reply.

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• BOOKS •

REREADING

Whitman's Triumph

VIJAY SESHADRI

On the Monday after the World Trade Center attack, I taught "Song of Myself" to my first-year-studies class in poetry (half literary survey, half workshop) at Sarah Lawrence. The class was the first group of freshmen I'd been put in charge of, and, nervous about facing people so young and expectant and free of dissimulation, I had planned the syllabus, in August, while vacationing in Vermont, with a minute and excessive rigidity: Whitman and Dickinson first, then a long leap back to Donne and Herbert, followed by a massive progression through Milton, Smart, Blake, Wordsworth's and Shelley's prose manifestos, Hardy and Hopkins, and then, in late November and early December, the blizzards of modernism—all of this buttressed by supplemental critical texts and contemporary poems that illustrated the persistence and continuity of theme, rhetoric, strategy. A muscle-bound course—but one that I was convinced would make my students, about whose respect for the past glories of poetry I was dubious, love the art as they never had before.

The syllabus I'd assembled in the Green Mountains during the summer had lost its specific density, and even a lot of its meaning, by that Monday; but the imperative, at the college and across New York City, which begins a few miles to the south, beyond Yonkers, was to get on with it, to affirm the ordinariness of our existences and the privilege, until then taken for granted, of the day-to-day business of working and living and studying, which, among other things, the murderers had sought to annihilate. I was as sedulous as anybody about getting on with it. I went into my Monday class thinking that we had already lost the previous Thursday's session to confusion and grief and talk that went nowhere, and that we had to turn back to the demands of my schedule. The dust from the collapse of the towers had been carried by the prevailing winds to the South Brooklyn neighborhood, just across the East River from Manhattan's financial district, where I live. That Tuesday and Wednesday, the air had been thick and infernal. There was an asbestos scare abroad. We were told not to go out without masks. Dust that was once the World Trade Center made the leaves of the plane trees and the ginkgoes spectral; it tarnished the pavements and covered the cars. All that week and into the next, I was among the millions of people in the city ricocheting from blank shock to incomprehension to grief to—this a liberation and a satisfaction, and the only energetic feeling most of us could summon—defiance (though defiance of what, I couldn't have said). From my roof, I'd seen the first tower collapse, and had already heard one of the stories about people I knew who had died, but in keeping with this strange defiance—which seemed atavistic, which antedated thought, and which was hardwired into the organism itself—and though it seemed almost sacrilegious, the first thing I did when I

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got back to Brooklyn from my Thursday class was to take my car to the local car wash and wash the dust off.

My freshman class might have been feeling something of the same defiance. They didn't, in any case, take to "Song of Myself," and they let me know it. A couple of them tried, half-heartedly, to defend Whitman, but most thought that what they called his "egotism"—a character trait vivid to people their age—was unattractive. The events of the previous week—their first week of classes in their first semester at college: a time, in normal circumstances, of anticipation and adventure—had made them wary and self-contained. They were politely incredulous when I pointed out this line (in the untitled 1855 version of the poem, which was the one we were using): "I am the man . . . . I suffered . . . . I was there." When I read the lines that follow soon after, lines that repeated quotation would make famous in subsequent weeks,

> I am the mashed fireman with breastbone broken . . . . tumbling walls buried me in their debris,
> Heat and smoke I inspired . . . . I heard the yelling shouts of my comrades,
> I heard the distant click of their picks and shovels;
> They have cleared the beams away . . . . they tenderly lift me forth.
>
> I lie in the night air in my red shirt . . . . the pervading hush is for my sake,
> Painless after all I lie, exhausted but not so unhappy,
> White and beautiful are the faces around me . . . . the heads are bared of their fire-caps,
> The kneeling crowd fades with the light of the torches.

they said yes, he was empathetic and prescient, but returned to the question of his self-love. Wasn't this another one of its manifestations? they asked, with a sophistication about human motives that I found impressive (though, in this case, misplaced). I told them that the poem, untitled in the 1855 edition, was called "Walt Whitman" through successive editions of *Leaves of Grass* after 1856, until the comprehensive edition of 1881 (the one that was banned in Boston), when it came to be called by the name we know. Didn't such aplomb, so barefaced, so unashamed, actually subvert conventional ideas about egotism, and suggest that something else was at work? No, they said. A poet who would call a poem by his own name had some real problems. I told them about the Upanishads and the Oversoul. I talked about Whitman's fresh and original use of the English language, unequaled outside Shakespeare: "Blacksmiths with grimed and hairy chests environ the anvil"—that verb choice, so precise, visual, and unexpected; the wonderful play of the conjunct consonants; the clash as of metals between "environ" and "anvil"—and "Happiness . . . . which whoever hears me let him or her set out in search of this day," with its nested, overlapping relative clauses handled with speed and effortless athleticism. I told them that "Song of Myself," which seems so much like a natural object, a mountain range or a piece of driftwood, was, in fact, strictly Aristotelian, with a beginning, a middle, and an end; a turn in its curious plot (wherein a certain individual born on Long Island the same year as Herman Melville becomes the universe itself); and a moment of discovery, which occurs in and around the fireman passage. I drew their attention to the lines in "The Sleepers" in which the poet transforms himself into a woman and has a sexual encounter that concludes with the line "I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me."

"Can you believe that?" I asked. "'I feel the hot moisture yet that he left me'!"

"Yuck!" they replied.

My students weren't being obtuse or perverse. They were right to be skeptical. Under a lot of the circumstances of reading and rereading, there is something endlessly suspicious about Whitman; the endlessness of the suspicion is, in fact, one of the indications of his stature. The tremendous access of reality, the constant presence of incidental beauty, and the lines themselves, tense with meaning yet so relaxed, are never sufficient to protect us from the invasiveness of the all-or-nothing Whitman proposition. And his enthusiasms spring from, and bear the mark of, the choicer elements of the freakish era in which he lived: phrenology and P. T. Barnum; animal magnetism and hydropathy; harebrained schemes to invade

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Canada; manifest destiny; the Mexican War (of which Whitman was an egregious journalistic booster, and about which Grant, a sober political realist of great integrity, said, "For myself, I was bitterly opposed to the measure, and to this day regard the war, which resulted, as one of the most unjust ever waged by a stronger against a weaker nation"); ham actors; Chautauquas; the Burnt-out District; the inexorable march to Fort Sumter. This is the frenzied atmosphere of which "Song of Myself" is the exuberant, exhaustive, and—except for rare clunkers like "You should have been with us that day round the chowder kettle"—perfect embodiment. Approached in the wrong mood, or from the wrong angle, it can all seem a little too much.

But what angle was right? Sitting at the seminar table, I sensed that I wasn't doing justice to this poem, which I had read and marveled over since the age of sixteen, when, as a freshman myself, in an introductory poetry course similar to this one, I'd encountered it in the anthology we were assigned, *The Mentor Book of Major American Poets*, a book I still have. The poem had never shaped my writing. On the life I lived in the years after college, though, it had exerted a powerful subterranean influence. The last time dust and ash from a cataclysm had fallen on my car was in May of 1980, when Mount Saint Helens had erupted. Temporarily homeless, I was living in my 1970 Volkswagen bus (red, with a gold hand-painted top), which I parked at night in a small, long-abandoned drive-in theater, surrounded by the trees of the Coast Range, in South Beach, on the central Oregon coast. My life then had been one that Whitman not only would have approved of but had practically invented: my occupation was Jeffersonian (I was a commercial salmon fisherman, though not an entirely effective one); my central ideas were pantheistic; my friends were "powerful uneducated persons"—Whitman's children of Adam. (Looking back now, the way I was living appears almost comically Whitmanesque, though I was as convinced about what I was doing in those days as I've ever been.) I woke up that May morning to find a fine coat of gray dust, carried two hundred miles west by the weather and clotted a little in places because there had been an early-morning squall, covering my car. Mount Saint Helens had had its victims, too, though that dust, unlike this dust, had seemed to be one of the unambiguous blessings of nature.

I had, therefore, a small personal stake in the poem, in the appeal of its creed and the validity of its imperatives. How was I going to justify it to these skeptical children? A little confused, I let the discussion go on without me for a minute or two, feeling that slightly vertiginous panic which teachers at a loss for words feel. Then, in repudiation of the word *pantheism,* which was bouncing around in my head and calling up images of the Pacific seen from Yaquina Head and of Yaquina Bay bristling with salmon boats (and flushed out, maybe, by the emotions of the past six days—emotions that, though they ranged from grief to rage, were suffused with a sense of powerlessness), I had an insight. I'd reread the Puritan divines from Edwards to Emerson over the past summer; I'd reread Justin Kaplan's biography of Whitman; I had picked, sometimes inattentively (there's a lot of dreck there), over the entire Whitman corpus. But something about the poem had escaped me—had, in fact, until that moment, always escaped me. I took out the copy of the Bible I'd brought to class in order to read, if we had time to look at "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" ("Flood-tide below me! I see you face to face!"), St. Paul's telling the church at Corinth that now we see through a glass darkly but then we will see face to face. I told my class that "Song of Myself" was understood in the collective critical mind as a pantheistic poem, an ardent poem, a revolutionary poem, but that it was actually a poem of the severest orthodoxy and hardness, and coldness, even; that it was understood as a mystical poem, as an "Eastern" poem, a Vedantic poem, but that while many things in it might justify such an interpretation, its structure, its inner body, its circulatory rhythms, suggested something else. Whitman was, I told my students, far closer to Edwards than he was to Emerson (Emerson, for that matter, was far closer to Edwards than he was to Emerson). For all his empathy and his eroticism, for all his modernity and his gee-whiz mastery of the vocabulary of nineteenth-century popular science (the employment, for example, of the

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word *oscillating* to describe the bodies of flying seagulls in "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry"—how did he come up with that?), Whitman was in the business of writing something admonitory and militant and ancient and Western. The text he was expounding was this one:

> Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,
> In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.
> For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.
> So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.
> O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?

The drama the poem enacted was the triumph over death.

To think, however accurately, that you've had a peak-in-Darien experience, that you've come across something so simple and inevitable it is presumptively true, can be pretty exhilarating. The class period ended on my suspended trumpet note, we broke up, and I walked away in the grip of a revelation. It was as if I had dreamed up the structure of the benzene ring or discovered the gravitational force. Of course. "Song of Myself" and "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry" (the 1856 *Paradiso*, with Manhattan as the city on the hill) were as allegorical as the *Divine Comedy*, and were as enmeshed in the same cosmic narrative, though now abstracted. "I stop some where waiting for you," Whitman says at the end of "Song of Myself," and there he was. The triumph over death. Almost a dozen people I knew who worked in the buildings had escaped; two I knew, who had been leading lives as ordinary as my own—lives that might just as well have been my own—hadn't. Their stories, and the stories of all those others, bouncing between the two absences in the skyline—back and forth, back and forth—gave the depression and grief an uncontainable energy. And, always, when I thought I was back to myself, alone with myself, there were, available to automatic glances from many corners in my neighborhood, and from points along which I traveled, the sickening absences in the skyline.

I taught the poem again that week. I went and talked about Whitman on Thursday evening, at the invitation, proffered months before, of Alice Quinn, *The New Yorker*'s poetry editor, to a class she teaches at Columbia. These were graduate students and many were longtime residents of the city. They were somber and uninterested in disputes, and listened quietly when, after a half-hour of preliminaries, I laid out my argument. I began with the fireman passage, lines 843 to 850 in the 1855 edition. Work your way around the strange terrain the poem has just traversed to arrive at this point, I told them. The border begins at these extraordinary lines (709–714):

> Swift wind! Space! My Soul! Now I know it is true what I guessed at;
> What I guessed when I loafed on the grass,
> What I guessed while I lay alone in my bed
> . . . . and again as I
> walked the beach under the paling stars of the morning.
>
> My ties and ballasts leave me . . . . I travel
> . . . . I sail . . . . my elbows
> rest in the sea-gaps,
> I skirt sierras . . . . my palms cover continents,
> I am afoot with my vision.

Notice the psychic tension, amounting to what some might call insanity. A catalogue follows. What he guessed at long ago in the poem, when he loafed on the grass, is that the "smallest sprout shows there is really no death," that "All goes onward and outward . . . . and nothing collapses, / And to die is different from what anyone supposed, and luckier." But something has happened between those assertions and this catalogue, which is twin of the catalogue that begins at line 257 ("The pure contralto sings in the organloft . . ."), the magnificent aria of the human occupations. The earlier catalogue was in the third person. This one is in the first person: "I am the hounded slave . . . Hell and despair are upon me"; "I visit the orchards of God and look at the

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spheric product" (spectacular, that "spheric product"); "I turn the bridegroom out of bed and stay with the bride myself." The first catalogue was sunny and ideal, and melodic, as were the assertions of the good news of death. This one is his *liebestod*, beginning in a derangement of the senses ("My elbows rest in the sea-gaps . . . my palms cover continents"), continuing in spasms of disintegrative energy, and culminating in episodes of destruction and violence—the fireman, "the fall of grenades through the rent roof," the massacre at Goliad. "It cannot fail," Whitman insists through the images of suffering and death that crowd around the last third of the poem. "To anyone dying . . . . thither I speed and twist the knob of the door"; "O despairer . . . I dilate you with tremendous breath"; "The weakest and shallowest is deathless with me." Everywhere the verse is fragmentary, self-erasing, and "oscillates" wildly. The triumph over death, which leads to the again sunny and spacious assimilations—"And any man or woman shall stand cool and supercilious before a million universes"—that end the poem.

I told the class that Whitman shows us who he really is here. Here—not in the doctrine of the poem but in the distribution of its energies, in the jagged, feverish expansions of the writing—he reveals himself not as the pantheist, the mystic, the sage but as the Christian soldier setting out to harrow the underworld. Many people have pointed out the sea change in the poem, I said, but until now no one has guessed at what it means. Blissfully unaware of whether this last statement was true or not—I've always made sure to stay ignorant of the Whitman critical literature—I ended there, took some questions, thanked the assembled students, and went home. But I was filled with my idea for days, and didn't really begin to let it go until the bombing started and a new kind of somberness, a new watchfulness, replaced the one that we New Yorkers had been living with in the weeks following the attack. I don't know whether my rereading of the poem in the light of the terrible event can hold water far beyond that event, or whether, when I read it the way I did, it was my intelligence at work rather than the universal feelings of depression and powerlessness working on me; somehow, a month and a half into what people insist is a new world, "Song of Myself" just seems more inscrutable than I had ever given it credit for being, and even richer and more profound. "I too am untranslatable," Whitman says at the end, and he is probably right. But seeing the poem in the way I saw it helped me. It gave me a way to hold the event in my mind, to come closer to it and not be afraid. I'm grateful to the poem, and to the coincidences that required me to reread it.

I had some more commerce with Whitman in the aftermath of the attack. In the third week of October, I read from him at one of the many memorial readings in New York that month. I had only five minutes—many people were reading—so I chose some passages from "Crossing Brooklyn Ferry." The passage I ended with was this one:

> Ah, what can ever be more stately and admirable to me than mast-hemm'd Manhattan?
> River and sunset and scallop-edg'd waves of flood-tide?
> The sea-gulls oscillating their bodies, the hay-boat in the twilight, and the belated lighter?
> What gods can exceed these that clasp me by the hand, and with voices I love call me promptly and loudly by my nighest name as I approach?
> What is more subtle than this which ties me to the woman or man that looks in my face?
> Which fuses me into you now, and pours my meaning into you?
>
> We understand then do we not?
> What I promised without mentioning it, have you not accepted?
> What the study could not teach—what the preaching could not accomplish is accomplish'd, is it not?

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The Editorial Board and staff are pleased to announce the fourth annual AMERICAN SCHOLAR Awards, honoring the best writing that appeared in our pages during the past year.

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Best Essay

"The Anti-Jefferson"
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Spring
Best Work by a Younger Writer

"Love's Wound, Love's Salve"
by SVEN BIRKERTS
Autumn
Best Literary Criticism

"Boaz Asleep"
(translation of Victor Hugo's *"Booz endormi"*)
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Autumn
Best Poem

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The Depths of Feeling

MARK KINGWELL

UPHEAVALS OF THOUGHT: THE INTELLIGENCE OF EMOTIONS
by Martha Nussbaum. Cambridge University Press. $39.95.

According to a widely held view of the species, philosophers have neither had much time for the emotions, nor been able to cultivate them very successfully, being—in the popular imagination, and sometimes also their own—dead from the neck down. If this widely held view is in fact inaccurate (philosophers are actually more devoted servants of the emotions than poets are, at least when gauged by time spent writing about them and volume of pages produced), it does express an important partial truth. Philosophers have on the whole distrusted emotions, regarding anger and envy and other passions as distracting or even deleterious to thought, chaotic winds battering the walls of Reason. Thus the main, eliminative form of their interest: philosophy has over the centuries devised many ingenious programs of emotional dissection and destruction, the better to facilitate the smooth application of cold logic. Call this the Vulcan School of philosophical aspiration: Spock-like contempt for, and suppression of, the emotions.

But even this partial truth is misleading, because it underestimates the extent to which philosophers hostile to the emotions are respectful of both the power and the knowledge inherent in what they seek to stifle. The Stoics, in particular, should probably not be seen as Vulcans *avant la lettre,* despite what is often thought. Believing that emotions were irrational not in being unbidden and senseless (like hunger), but in being cognitive yet erroneous (like a belief in a flat earth), the Stoics took seriously the personal and community challenges emotions posed. These two senses of "irrational," though often confused, imply a crucial distinction. For the Stoics, emotions are not infantile and incorrigible feelings, meant to be simply annulled; they are, rather, corrigible feelings based on mistaken judgments concerning the individual's place in the world, which can therefore be rationally addressed. It's not all a matter of iron control, battening down the mind against threatening storms. Emotions are cognitive, so reason has a foothold in understanding them.

Even if we are persuaded of this, however, the question is still whether this eliminative cognitive account is the right one. As Martha Nussbaum argues in *Upheavals of Thought,* her thorough, elegant, and frequently brilliant account of the intelligence of emotions, the Stoics get the first part of the equation right: emotions are not mere gusts of feeling, but states that contain and express knowledge of ourselves and our relations to things and forces outside us. Where the Stoics go wrong, and where Nussbaum seeks at some length to repair the damage, is in joining this cognitive understanding with a particular normative recommendation, namely to reform or get rid of emotions altogether. Nussbaum wants to keep the baby: instead of a purging of emotion, she proposes a project of retention and respect in which emotions are regarded as key elements in the larger cognitive structures guiding ethics and politics.

The publication of such a book would be an event at any time, since Nussbaum is a leading American philosopher and here both captures and extends the scattered arguments in favor of this revision; she also builds on her previous

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work, in particular *Love's Knowledge* (1990) and *The Therapy of Desire* (1994). Though their bewildered students may not know it, contemporary philosophers have for some time been trying to make greater room for emotion in the account of human personhood and agency. In addition to this, though, Nussbaum's book appears at a moment when the emotions, especially anger and vengefulness, but also grief and anxiety, have arisen forcibly as political issues. Is it appropriate to act out of anger when one has been injured very close to home? Why does the proximity of pain make mourning more acute? What are the limits of compassion when the objects of potential compassion do not look like us, or when they live in ways quite foreign to our own?

To raise such questions in a useful fashion, rather than merely venting or declaiming, we must go beyond existing misperceptions of the relationship between emotion and reason—a difficult task at any time, all the more so when emotions run high. It is too simple to draw a line, as many do, between the two and leave it at that. Such polarization leads to the Vulcan temptation on the one hand, but also to a peculiar form of (usually hawkish, right wing and populist) anti-intellectualism on the other, according to which anyone seeking understanding or demanding nuance in a time of trial is thought to be too philosophical for decent company.

As long as we persist in seeing the emotions as simply ranged against reason, it doesn't matter which side we choose to support in the resulting endless battle; the situation will always resist resolution or even insight. Philosophy will be condemned for its bloodlessness and even borderline treason in times of crisis; and emotion, at least when business is more or less as usual, will be subjected to constant pathologization and medicalization, labeled an irrational disease in need of a cure. Such skirmishing is good sport for editorialists and polemicists on both sides, depending on the prevailing cultural winds, but it doesn't help us gain a better appreciation of our place in the world, or the limits of our ability to make sense of that world. For that, we need to rethink the status of emotions in human life as neither self-justifying overrides of reason nor implacable enemies of sense.

Nussbaum takes many of her cues, not to mention her title, from Marcel Proust, and his example both illustrates and undermines the ambition of this, or indeed any, philosophical account of intelligent emotion. Proust's extended engagement with the emotions as states and reflections of one unique and highly self-conscious personality is a triumph of the novel form, but also an implicit deconstruction of its fundamental ambitions—a deconstruction handled more explicitly in, say, Joyce's *Ulysses*. For no matter how detailed and nuanced the final prose rendering, the emotional states of even an ordinary consciousness, let alone a rich and tormented one, escape the boundaries of language.

The inability of the most inventive and discriminating language to translate emotional states fully doesn't stop novelists from writing, any more than perpetual disagreement has stopped philosophers from thinking; but when philosophy tries to corral emotion, it stumbles into a particularly sticky version of the Proustian dilemma. No matter how sympathetic their approach, philosophers still function in a rehabilitative mode, bringing emotion back into the rational fold of discourse. This cannot help domesticating feelings somehow, which means that despite Nussbaum's subtlety and apparent open-mindedness, a version of the old polarization and resulting relationship of priority is still up and running. Surprise, surprise: philosopher finds emotions to be rational after all!

This inbuilt (and inescapable) limitation aside, or at any rate provisionally accepted, Nussbaum's version of emotional cognitivism does offer a comprehensive and useful account of the emotions as ethical and political forces. As she rightly notes, emotions are cognitive precisely because they light up our embeddedness in a web of existence we cannot completely control. If love and grief are the emotions usually associated with "higher" attachments between persons, compassion and fear are often associated with "lower" things such as physical deprivation and personal humiliation. Emotions are rooted in physicality, both as they are felt (the hot flashes of anger, the sickly paleness of mourning) and as they are generated (responding to our place in a world of sharp objects and personalities).

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While Nussbaum speaks here and there of the importance of the body to an understanding of emotion, especially in a good but too-brief section on shame and disgust, she is never inclined to put the body first, to view rational thought as an outcome, a coping mechanism, generated by vulnerable, spongy creatures with an unpleasant awareness of their own weakness. Where, for instance, is the force of Hume's insight that reason is the slave of the passions, a faculty that forms ideas to justify and promote feelings, not the other way around? What about the fact that changes in the body's chemistry, whether willed or involuntary, create emotional surcharges? Low blood-sugar levels can make us irritable, coursing hormones can make us weepy, and ingested drugs can add all kinds of texture, welcome and unwelcome, to emotional life. This troubling but basic aspect of emotion is absent from the account, when it should really be a starting point.

Like so many contemporary philosophers, Nussbaum has an idea of human reason that is, well, a little too reasonable. Her lucid and faultless prose, usually a joy to read, begins to take on a somewhat self-conscious and aloof quality, a hint of rational superiority. The complexities of self-justification, delusion, bad faith, and hidden motives are either absent or underemphasized. Why? Where, more basically, is the *feeling* of feelings? Nussbaum claims to leave room for the phenomenology of feeling, but when, for instance, she writes of her grief at her mother's death—a welcome personal example of how her own emotional states could be seen as cognitive—one cannot help thinking that her responses, at least as rendered in post-facto prose, have a somewhat attenuated quality. Of course no sane person would suggest that she did not experience the deep rents of grief—there is too much evident sincerity in her account for that. Nevertheless, Nussbaum offers little sense of how it actually felt to grieve.

Unless my own experience of emotion is anomalous, which I rather doubt—and in any case, it's all I have to go on—there is always an unresolved remainder of irrational feeling in a genuine emotional episode: that, after all, is part of what we otherwise rational people resent. When I have been jealous, it has felt to me flinty and overwhelming and nauseating. Anger comes upon me rarely, but when it does, the experience is one of rising bodily heat, like a flush, that suffuses my sense of the world; the expression "seeing red" is suddenly not just comprehensible but literal. And when, not long ago, I lost someone I loved deeply, after a prolonged period of conflict and uncertainty, I felt sluggish and winded and half-dead. I slept for hours and woke up feeling as if there were a thick bag of sand lying across my chest. The cognitive part of the experience may be available for analysis, but there is also something else there that will not be reduced or corrected: the feeling itself.

Bodily needs are in play in a different way when it comes to the emotion of compassion. Because of the form consciousness takes, namely locating itself in separate bodies, we are so constituted that we cannot, despite the claims of a recent president, feel anyone else's pain; that is just one of the manifold limitations of our relations with the other creatures we (seem to) encounter in the world of shared experience. But we can feel a peculiar form of pain, which is pain from witnessing the pain of others. Compassion, which along with love receives Nussbaum's most sustained attention, is perhaps the central political emotion, since it is the one that builds solidarity and commitment among otherwise unrelated individuals.

Here Nussbaum breaks ranks with the still-dominant strain of liberal justice theory, which (following John Rawls) tends to place its normative faith in a system of constraints based on the assumption of ignorance in social contractors. If we restrict knowledge of outcomes and our role in them, the argument goes, we will generate principles of justice like equality of opportunity and the redistribution of wealth. Nussbaum argues, by contrast, that we should combine compassion with knowledge and try to generate just results with our eyes wide (but not teary) and our hearts open (but not bleeding). Understanding justice as a sense of shared vulnerability rather than as the application of rational principles would leave many aspects of the liberal-democratic state in place, but it would make us more responsive to the power of exceptions and extenuations.

This kind of emotional contextualism is a welcome antidote to the aridity and proceduralism of much contemporary liberal theory,

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but it is naturally afflicted with numerous problems of qualification and application that can be only partially addressed here, at the level of theory. We do tend to feel more compassion for those who are physically proximate, who look and live as we do, than for those whose connection to us is merely species-based, obscured by the otherness of distance, appearance, lifestyle. Compassion requires imagination to function; we must be able to see the other as an entity like us, capable of the same suffering and pain. But to say that is merely to meet one complex contingency with another, for imagination can only be cultivated, never legislated.

Thus the project of extending compassion must always cope with its eventual failure, and the dreamlike political ambitions of the modern West—which have been, if we could only admit it, to overcome both conflict and death in a bland utopia of personal happiness—ultimately face self-defeat. Just as there is an irreducible, irrational element in emotion, there is a similar one when it comes to casting the net of liberalism ever wider, an opaque lump of hostility that rejects accommodation. Some external others will not submit to understanding, and some forms of pain will not surrender their essence even to the most well-meaning stranger. We have been forcibly reminded in recent months that not everyone wants to play the game by our rules. That realization has been revelatory and shocking, but what is perhaps even more unsettling is that, as so often, we can expect no future logical explanation of why we have been rejected.

Philosophy and liberalism have the same tolerant ambitions, asking everyone and everything to come inside—on their terms. But there will always be a squeezing-out of terrible and ungovernable anger, a slow leak of melancholy, a searing stab of jealousy that will not be managed. Upheavals of thoughts are still, primarily, upheavals; emotions, fleshy and wet, will not be finally colonized by intelligence, even their own. The antidotes with which philosophy has medicated the cup of life, to paraphrase Seneca, cannot give it salubrity or sweetness; they can at best allay its bitterness and temper its malignity. The balm that philosophy drops on the wounds of the heart abates their pain but cannot heal them.

Is that enough? Fortunately or otherwise, it

Pilgrim's Progress

THE BIRDS OF HEAVEN: TRAVELS WITH CRANES

By Peter Matthiessen. North Point Press. $27. Paintings and Drawings by Robert Bateman.

Reviewed by DAVID GESSNER

The trouble with the term *nature writing* is that it conjures up an image of a quaint, anachronistic art, the literary equivalent of quilting, with little relevance to contemporary life. There are those, and I am one of them, who believe that much of the writing so labeled does have relevance—direct, immediate relevance—to the modern world, and that, rather than being confined to some small side ditch, recent writing about place often flows very much in the mainstream of American literature, directly linked to the work and themes that sprang from mid-nineteenth century romanticism. This connection has been made most recently and decisively by Barry Lopez, who points to Thoreau, Emerson, Melville, Cather, Steinbeck, and Faulkner as predecessors of the writers involved in the recent explosion of what he calls "the literature of place." The word *explosion* is not overstatement. In poetry we have Snyder, Ammons, Levertov, Oliver, Rogers; and in nonfiction Berry, Hay, Dillard, Lopez, Bass, Abbey, Williams, Finch, Stegner, Sanders, Nabhan, Zwinger, and Saner, among others.

All of these writers, to different degrees, reach out to a place between science and art. What the best produce is a grittier and fact-based outgrowth of the passionate labor of their romantic forefathers, a hardheaded romanticism in which a pine cone is seen not as a mirror of the human but simply as a pine cone. From this point of view, the work defines itself in opposition to romantic tradition as surely as

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it springs from it. The challenge of the modern author who sets out to write an ode to a nightingale lies in conveying a knowledge of the bird's breeding and migratory habits while managing not to drown in minutiae.

With *The Snow Leopard,* Peter Matthiessen gave us a masterpiece of the genre, trekking not just into the Himalayas, but through a land between reverie and hard reality. The book balanced the accumulation of raw detail with occasional moments of illumination ("wind and sun poured through me as through a bell"). Go too heavy on the latter and the writing turns to mystical mush; too heavy on the former and we are bludgeoned by fact. *The Snow Leopard* was a shining book, but it did require the reader to slog along with the author, to put in miles before being lifted in rare high moments. John Elder writes of Matthiessen that his narrative possesses "the evocative simplicity of haiku" and adds: "To a charged mind, swirling with the particles of perception and the waves of emotions, all 'facts' are numinous." Perhaps. But the reader—charged mind or not—cannot be expected to transform the text. The life-giving jolt must be supplied by a writer fully in control, knowing just how much of each—science and haiku—to dole out.

Contemporary American writers who take nature as their subject seem to be split into roughly two camps: the burrowers—literary homebodies such as Wendell Berry, who believe that by rooting down in one place we can discover the world—and the wanderers, such as Barry Lopez, who set out on wide-ranging adventures that usually wend their way to the same point, celebrating the beauty of particular places, plants, and animals, and eulogizing the local, often aboriginal, people who have lost or are losing the fight against outside forces.

Matthiessen is the reigning king of the wanderers, and *The Birds of Heaven,* with its epic scope and reach, could easily qualify as the lifework of one less energetic. For more than three hundred pages, the author, his sometimes exhausted readers in tow, never rests in pursuit of the elusive crane, traveling to the Bering Strait, Siberia, Japan, Africa, China, Bhutan, the demilitarized zone between the Koreas, Australia, and, finally, Florida and Wisconsin, tracking all fifteen species of the tall, near-mythic bird that, once revered and even worshiped, now fights for survival in the face of habitat loss, hunting, war, and drought.

Matthiessen writes: "If one has truly understood a crane—or a leaf or a cloud or a frog—one has understood everything." The challenge here is to resist presenting the crane only as humanity's mirror while making clear the significant role it plays in the human world, and Matthiessen does a masterful job. He sees the crane for itself, but he also understands that it acts as an indicator of environmental developments worldwide. To mix an ornithological metaphor, cranes are the canaries in the coal mine for the rest of us. Their need for clean water and undisturbed spaces led to their decline, and presaged our own growing environmental troubles.

While the cranes have made a comeback, aided by man, I can't say this book left me feeling very hopeful. Matthiessen's world tour reveals a polluted China where every weed is pulled with gusto, and nature, once revered, is now almost reviled; a Korea split into a depressed north and a south intoxicated by "frenzied capitalism"; a Japan where forests have long been depleted; and a Russia where the destruction of vast wild places seems only a breath away—in short, a world where wildlife and wildland are imperiled and where man is constantly at war, wreaking havoc on his neighbors, human and animal. Despite the work of George Archibald, head of the International Crane Foundation, and of the fledgling environmental movements in China, Korea, Russia, and Japan, one can't help feeling that the imperatives of population growth and the "economic point of view" will win out. Nevertheless, in the face of this human onslaught, the crane serves as an elegant reminder of another way to be on earth.

The early sections of *The Birds of Heaven* require much of the reader, and at times the balance described above is not quite achieved—names and places flying at us, fact overpowering moment. This is partly a difficulty inherent in the book's structure. *The Snow Leopard* gave us a single long trek, with a small cast of characters that we got to know well through a series of daily encounters. In *Cranes,* Matthiessen at first makes little effort to detail everyday activities, to engage us on a personal scale, to let us get to know any individuals well before we are whisked off to the next grand locale. As an ad-

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mitted burrower and no great fan of the epic, I felt bleary at times with travel, wondering which town we were in now, unpacking and then packing again. Facts about the cranes were often presented in isolation; and even in the field, Matthiessen's wide-angle perspective frequently distanced the reader from the scene. While the panoramic has the advantage of showing much, it lacks detail and intimacy. I would rather have been engaged more and impressed less.

This is, fortunately, a complaint that vanishes as the book progresses. For one thing, more and more sentences begin to demand underlining as the narrative slows and settles into scenes, often beautiful, of Matthiessen alone with his birds. Lyrically precise sentences like "The white cranes come sailing down the valley at the time appointed, swinging up into the frozen wind until it fills their broad, cupped wings and they step lightly down out of the air," and details like "The cranes of Kushiro still roost in streams; few if any are caught by the ice, though they sometimes fly up banded with ice anklets" reward the reader's diligence. There begin to be recurring characters to latch onto, too, most notably George Archibald, the "craniac," who performs an ecstatic crane dance upon learning that the Siberian species has returned to India. To a lesser extent, Archibald plays the counterbalancing role that "GS" played in *The Snow Leopard,* scientist to Matthiessen's Zen mystic. As with that earlier book, the reader will smooth this one out in memory, forgetting the arduous treks and remembering the transcendent moments. Moreover, even those with a preference for the personal will begin to find themselves won over by the narrative's sheer sweep and majesty.

Matthiessen writes that the demoiselle crane, one of the species he follows, is "in short, a far-flung bird." And this is, in short, a far-flung book. In a time when our pastoral bubble has burst, when we find ourselves a part of the world again, here is a volume that is best read with a globe handy. If it is indeed a "nature book," then it is a nature book for our times: every bit as cosmopolitan as the cranes themselves, confronting rather than retreating, and balancing the hope of the cranes' fight for life with a realistic assessment of the troubled state of human affairs.

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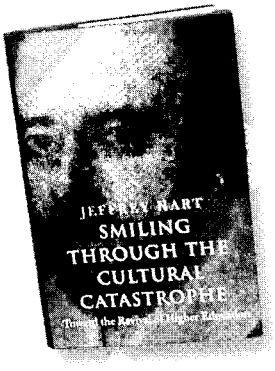

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Growing Up Alone

BORROWED FINERY: A MEMOIR
By Paula Fox. Henry Holt. $23.

Reviewed by RACHEL HADAS

Introducing the 1999 edition of Paula Fox's 1970 (and long out of print) novel *Desperate Characters,* Jonathan Franzen confesses that "my underlining and marginal annotations are getting out of hand. In my latest reading, I'm finding and flagging as vital . . . an enormous number of previously unflagged images involving order and chaos and childhood and adulthood. . . . I'm within sight of the point at which *every sentence* will be highlighted as vital and central."

I know exactly how Franzen feels, for the same words apply to *Borrowed Finery,* a memoir by Fox, who is the Newberry Award-winning writer of some twenty children's books as well as the author of six novels from the sixties and seventies, several of which have recently come back into print. Rich with detail, taut with menace, poised and authoritative in its local and its larger rhythms, this slim volume offers up passage after passage so suggestive, so significant, that the temptation is not merely to underline but to pluck each excerpt out and hold it up. The child accidentally locked out for the night; the uncle sneaking into the bathroom; the inscrutably cruel mother taking the girl for a drive as a cure or punishment for a toothache—each episode captures a fact of Fox's alarmingly disorganized early years. And yet the temptation to attach a theme to each brief, burnished incident must be resisted. The flavor left by *Borrowed Finery* is very strong, but it is not without nuances. Cruelty and rejection are important parts of the story; they are not the whole story.

Born in 1923, Paula Fox was "left in a Manhattan foundling home a few days after my birth by my reluctant father, and by Elsie, my mother, panic-stricken and ungovernable in her haste to have done with me." Given her parents' extraordinary irresponsibility, which sometimes seems calculated and sometimes casual, Fox's book can be read as a roller-coaster ride of abandonments and losses relieved by periodic rescues and respites. This series of curves can be rough going. As plotline, the portion of a life that is this memoir's province lurches from tragedy to comedy, with plenty of room for the ambiguous terrain between them. That Fox chooses to end on a high point—reunited with the grown daughter she had given up for adoption at birth, in a disturbing echo of her parents' behavior—feels redemptive yet arbitrary. A brilliant plot device such as the cat bite—which, steering and shaping the plot of *Desperate Characters,* impelled me to read that novel at one sitting—is nowhere in evidence in *Borrowed Finery.* Lacking a streamlined trajectory, the memoir conveys experience as one damn thing after another.

Yet many individual passages are so strong that the overall shape hardly matters. Most of the book's memorable portions are found in its first fifty pages or so, when Fox is recalling her early childhood. This may be because memories dredged up from such a distance are the most compelling. Possibly, too, the otherness, the deadpan distance of Fox's first-person narrative comes most convincingly from a tiny child who, even if aware of her motives, is powerless to explain them. But it is above all the luminous kindness of the minister Elwood Corning, Fox's "Uncle Elwood" and her protector in what she aptly calls "the short-lived Eden of my childhood," that imparts focus and luster to the prose here. For Elwood —an occasional poet and newspaper columnist as well as minister—is Fox's first teacher of language.

In a passage every bit as moving as some of the more lurid episodes of *Borrowed Finery,* the minister and the child meet in the benign territory of words.

> Except for an occasional clatter of typewriter keys, there was a companionable silence between us. He asked me once, "What shall I preach about next Sunday, Pauli?"
>
> "A waterfall," I replied at once. I had just been thinking about a recent picnic we had

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on the shore of a stream fed by a small cascade whose spray dampened our sandwiches and us.

I can still recall the startled pleasure I felt that Sunday in church when I realized his sermon was indeed about a waterfall. I grasped consciously for an instant what had been implicit in every aspect of daily life with Uncle Elwood—that everything counted and that a word spoken as meant contained a mysterious energy that could awaken thought and feeling in both speaker and listener.

By contrast, the other adults in the child's life tend to discourage her from attributing power to language: "We were going to take a bus to Schroon Lake . . . where [my father] and my 'sainted mother' had rented a cabin. I puzzled over his words about Elsie for a while, then gave it up as another mystery."

The lesson that everything counts, that words have a mysterious energy, is more than a survival tool for a child being raised in a kaleidoscope of domestic disorder, clashing narratives, lies, half-truths, and silences. It is also a most fortunate one for a writer to learn at such an early age. Do all authors who write masterfully of early childhood—one thinks of Dickens—emerge from chaotic households? Of course not. Vladimir Nabokov, Iris Origo, and James Merrill, all of them authors of radiant memoirs, were positively cosseted; their challenge was to recapture the lost paradise of their early years. Yet Fox too depicts a childhood not without its magical moments, from the peaceful scene with Uncle Elwood to more exotic settings in parts south and west. The powerfully focused detail in *Borrowed Finery*—the safety pin on an old man's black overcoat; the chameleon in a California kitchen; an old woman's pink bloomers glimpsed as she crawls out from under the table after an earthquake—captures episodes both peaceful and terrifying, comic and alarming, in precise and luminous language.

In the understated dynamism of its visual effects, in its tendency to displace feeling into terse description, and in its underlying theme of early loss, Fox's writing in *Borrowed Finery* strikingly recalls the work in poetry and prose of Elizabeth Bishop, a woman twelve years her senior. Bishop and Fox both survived early uprootings and calamitously motherless childhoods to become writers of masterly poise and control whose scale is sometimes obsessively limited.

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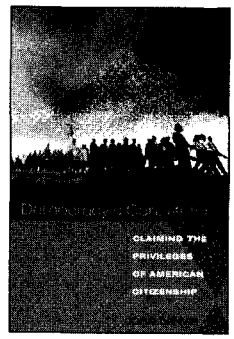

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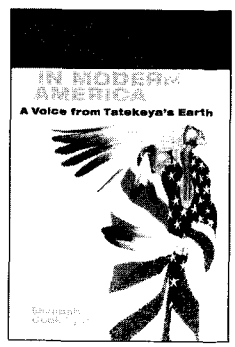

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Did Bishop ever read any of Fox's novels, I wonder? I think she would have enjoyed *Borrowed Finery.* Perhaps the memoir would have reminded Bishop, as it does me, of her own uncanny story "The Village," where a lovingly, sparely rendered provincial scene is made menacing and uncanny by the young mother's almost unseen (but recognized) insanity.

Some of Bishop's poems, as well, seem cut from the same cloth as Fox's memoir. The grandfather who teaches the child to greet neighbors in "Manners" corresponds to Uncle Elwood; the weeping grandmother in "Sestina" could be any one of a number of mournful elderly female relatives in *Borrowed Finery;* some of the servants in the sections of the memoir set in Florida and Cuba correspond to various Key West or Brazilian characters that Bishop evokes with dry humor and unsentimental affection.

Nor do the parallels end there. Bishop chose for three of her books of poems the titles *North & South; Questions of Travel;* and *Geography III.* In poem after poem in these books, a fundamental sense of orphaned displacement is evoked and then healed. "More delicate than the historian's are the mapmaker's colors," writes Bishop in "The Map," the opening poem of *Questions of Travel.* When Fox learns from her grandmother that in a few days she will go to Cuba, she comments: "I didn't know where Cuba was, but I found it in a school atlas, a green lizard lying athwart a blue sea."

Of all Bishop's poems, "The Waiting Room" probably comes closest to the world of the child early on in *Borrowed Finery.* For both little girls find an escape, at once refuge and window on the world, in the realm of books and pictures. Can it be a coincidence that both the child in "The Waiting Room" and the young Fox are depicted as poring almost desperately over the pictures in *National Geographic?* Fox can't yet read, but she drinks in the images:

> On the top steps of a narrow flight of stairs, alongside a collection of faded postcards, were piles of *National Geographic* magazines. I looked through them again and again. As I turned the glossy pages, I was startled each time by the singularity of everything that lived, whether in seashells, houses, nests, temples, logs, or forests, and in the multitude of ways creatures shelter and sustain themselves.
>
> One early afternoon—I had not yet learned to read—I was sitting on a step below the landing, an open book on my lap, inventing a story to fit the illustrations. It was raining. From the little table on which it sat in a dark corner at the foot of the staircase, I heard the telephone ringing.

Bishop: "I read it right straight through. / I was too shy to stop."

Intent and absorbed, these sober little girls are disrupted by the inauspicious sounds the grown-ups make—in "The Waiting Room," Aunt Consuelo's muffled cry of pain from the inner room at the dentist's office; in *Borrowed Finery,* the telephone call that turns out to be from Fox's father. "The word *father* was outlandish. It held an ominous note. I was transfixed by it. It was as though I had emerged from a dark wood into the sudden glare of headlights."

That dark wood, for all its Dante-esque reverberations, is a place where the imagination can flourish. It is the paradox of art like Fox's or Bishop's, whose patient control gives the illusion of equanimity and calm, that the dark wood is really a clearer place than the grown-up world with its cries of pain and its sudden, intrusive headlights.

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Conspiracy Fatigue

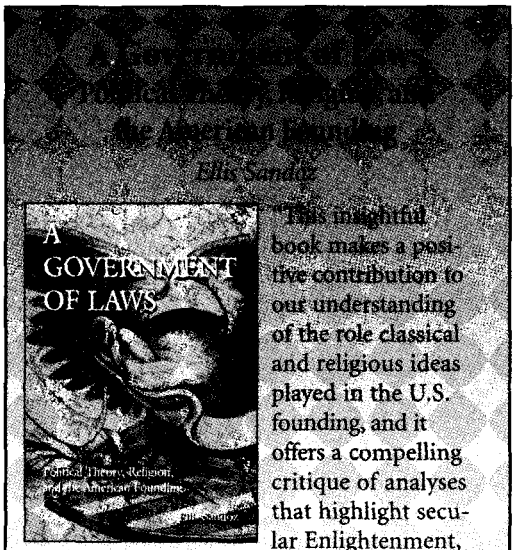
ENEMIES WITHIN:
THE CULTURE OF CONSPIRACY
IN MODERN AMERICA
By Robert Alan Goldberg.
Yale University Press. $29.95.

Reviewed by ANDREY SLIVKA

What do the assassination of President Lincoln and the alleged crash of a UFO in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947 have in common? Little, perhaps, in historical terms, but from the perspective of a certain segment of the U.S. population, quite a lot: both are believed to be at the center of vast conspiracies. These and other more or less mysterious incidents have become part of conspiracy lore, spread by pamphlet, book, Web site, and word of mouth. Originally, *conspiracy* meant a secret collaboration between people toward some wicked end. Denatured by use, however, it now seems to describe any insufficiently explicable phenomenon that provokes anxious distrust among Americans. As a result, few fields of study are as desperately in need of clarity as conspiracy theory. What precisely are we talking about when we talk about conspiracy? At what point does a healthy distrust of government cross the threshold into neurosis? What is it about the relationship between contemporary Americans and contemporary American power that generates conspiracist thinking?

Robert Alan Goldberg's *Enemies Within: The Culture of Conspiracy in Modern America* gestures in the direction of confronting such questions, but in the end avoids careful analysis to indulge in the same broad generalities and imprecision that plague the field. Take, for example, his summing-up of conspiracy's hold on America today. "In essence," Goldberg explains, "conspiracism is an American tradition. Yet there is danger in the observance. Conspiracism demonizes opponents and makes struggle

Andrey Slivka is Contributing Editor at the *New York Press*, a New York City weekly newspaper.



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internecine. Victories in such conflicts can only be Pyrrhic. Conspiracy thinking has moved Americans beyond a healthy skepticism of authority. Lacking public confidence, core institutions become unstable and lose their ability to govern. The cancer of conspiracism has begun to metastasize. Without a new awareness of its character and quick intervention, countersubversion may overcome the body politic."

Let's ignore the formulation that has Americans "observing" conspiracism as a tradition, and at least two other irritations, to concentrate on the passage's more crucial transgressions. For example, there's the allegation that the victories of conspiracists must be Pyrrhic. They might be Pyrrhic—but then again, they might not. In the unlikely event that conspiracists uncover the truth about a historical incident, why not celebrate the discovery? In addition, the American countersubversive impulse might overcome "the body politic"—but again, it might not, and Goldberg is possibly overestimating the peril. It's hard to see Oliver Stone, Louis Farrakhan, and the rest—the anti-New-World-Order militants, the off-the-grid FEMA-haters, the rustics convinced that government perfidy is about to trigger the Apocalypse, the UFO aficionados—loosing energies that destroy our representative democracy. (In fact, if you've absorbed the lessons of September 11, you might be forgiven for desiring rather more countersubversion in your body politic, toward preserving liberal democracy and preventing the massacre of its adherents.)

One admirable aspect of Goldberg's sloppy, undernourishing book is his generosity in approaching conspiracy culture. He's working against Richard Hofstadter's famous 1964 essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," which discussed the conspiracist tendencies of that era's right wing with an amused, mandarin detachment. Goldberg approaches the matter differently. "Rather than reducing public fears to the sum of individual disorders," he writes, taking a gentle swipe at Hofstadter, "I seek to consider conspiracy imaging in its historical, social, and political environment." This is reassuring, even if clumsily worded. It would be good to have a book that did such a thing.

But Goldberg's isn't it. He doesn't follow through. His first chapter is promising. He argues that the "American tradition" of what he sometimes calls "conspiracy imaging" (a phrase only an academic could love) began even with the Puritans, whose confidence in their divinely sanctioned mission generated a countervailing energy: the anxious tendency toward countersubversion that would result in witch trials. After this, however, Goldberg gallops through American history, subsuming events into his narrative with too little discrimination. Was it really "conspiracy thinking" that was crucial in motivating Progressive Era muckrakers? You don't have to be a conspiracist to distrust big business. Also, there's a difference between, on the one hand, hanging women as witches, and, on the other, fearing subversion by foreign nationals during a war. The latter fear has had vile consequences in our history, but it's different in important ways from condemning innocent people to death. Goldberg habitually elides these distinctions. He sees conspiracism motivating events even when there are other credible explanations for them. Part of the problem is Goldberg's equation of "countersubversion" with "conspiracism." All conspiracism is countersubversive, perhaps —but not all countersubversion is conspiracist.

FOR THE FIRST TIME, PERHAPS, A TENABLE HISTORY OF JESUS

It won't be found in the Bible. As borne out by critical analysis, the New Testament Gospels are sloppy history, giving a picture of Jesus more imaginative than factual. Frankly, most Christians seem not to care--transcendentalism spins its own reality. But true realists, for whom accurate history matters, may be pleased with what the recently discovered *Gospel of Thomas* provides. It consists of 113 notes taken down by a disciple of things he heard Jesus say that perplexed him. Thus the notes probably have not suffered alteration and were written down at the time heard--the best kind of source for a history.

Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. He provides all the text of *Thomas* with comments and Marcan context, thereby retrieving a narrative of Jesus that is tenably historical.

This ***historical*** Jesus based his teaching on the Epicurean philosophy, not on Judaism with its fasting, praying, almsgiving, and obeying food laws. This ***historical*** Jesus said, "Tell no lie and never do what you hate." This ***historical*** Jesus never mentioned a devil, demons, or hell. Epicureanism also shaped Jesus' thought that God and Caesar are man-made authorities and that one's ultimate authority should be oneself.

Hannah's book is 321 pgs., pbk., $12 postpaid. Please order by check or money order from:

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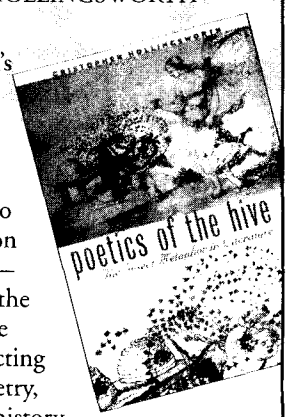
The bulk of *Enemies Within* treats five phenomena of the culture of conspiracy: the Communist "master conspiracy" that so exercised the John Birch Society; the anxieties of some Christians who combine a belief in imminent apocalypse with distrust of the government; the speculation about the JFK assassination; Farrakhanite anti-Jewish and generally anti-white paranoia; and the Roswell UFO incident of 1947. Almost every passage in this section is written with the combination of recklessness and rhetorical ham-fistedness that characterizes the book. (Goldberg, a professor of history at the University of Utah, has produced a solid, well-written biography of Barry Goldwater. What happened here? *Enemies Within* reads as if it were written in one draft, by a sophomore, for a dawn deadline.) Here's another passage: "Basking in their secret knowledge and relishing anointment as freedom fighters, Birchers eagerly took up a proselytizing mission to convert the nation. . . . The movement's indoctrination program and authoritarian structure never shaped a single mind of the community of believers. Birchers, many of whom were wealthy and highly educated, did not surrender their wills or follow their leader blindly."

Every Bircher basked and relished? How does Goldberg know that at least some Birchers didn't take up their mission dutifully? Or sullenly? And if Birchers were proselytizers, what portion of their "knowledge" was "secret"? Moreover, it's presumptuous to claim that not one Bircher's mind was "shaped" by the Bircher community. Not even one of them followed John Birch leader Robert Welch blindly?

I suspect that Goldberg's adventures in insubstantiation and gross generality have to do with his stated desire to work against Hofstadter's influence. Rereading Hofstadter, one gets the sense that, in his opinion, there was little about your average right-winger that a spot of Freudian analysis couldn't fix. This attitude combined condescension with a pretense of commonality: the Bircher could come around to the bow-tied intellectual's progressive worldview if only he stopped being so damn screwed up. Hofstadter's approach, needless to say, is anachronistic. These days, instead of a potential analysand, we have a conspiracist "subject" who's "constructed" by discursive networks: the energy has shifted from what's exclusively

Poetics of the Hive

The Insect Metaphor in Literature
BY CRISTOPHER HOLLINGSWORTH



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—Thomas R. Edwards, executive editor of *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*

"Hollingsworth's wide-ranging exploration of the image of the hive is impressive. *Poetics of the Hive* and its panoply of references cannot fail to enrich university classrooms, especially those devoted to both the visual arts and literature."—Dore Ashton, author of *A Fable of Modern Art*

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within to what's mostly without. Now, rather than ascribing conspiracist beliefs to private neurosis, we must consider them a general phenomenon—we're all in it together. Goldberg gallops breathlessly through information gleanable from pop studies of conspiracist thinking (Jonathan Vankin's entertaining books, for example), and then lays on grand claims—the body politic is threatened!—to justify his effort. He would have done better to slow down and stick more closely to what he seemed to announce he would do: examine how conspiracist discourse exists in its American context—how it moves, how it interacts, what it prevents and makes possible in the culture, where it fits on the contemporary map of power.

In Goldberg's defense, an author who confronts this phenomenon must be very careful to avoid being handcuffed by it. Conspiracy culture can be rather dreary and barren. An interesting nonacademic book about it is Daniel Pipes's 1997 *Conspiracy: How the Paranoid Style Flourishes and Where It Comes From,* which admitted that conspiracism tends to be a phenomenon of a society's marginal elements, and discussed its roots in the anti-Jewish and anti-secret-society traditions. Unlike Goldberg, Pipes chose not to concentrate respectfully on the contemporary manifestations of conspiracism. (Notably, while Goldberg insists that conspiracy culture has grown since World War II, Pipes argues that it's declined.) Try as a scholar might to examine conspiracism generously and without condescension, he might find himself trying to squeeze blood from a stone. Conspiracism is hermetic, unfruitful, monologic. There's no working with it; it leads to nothing. Hofstadter observed that the conspiracist's labor has "the quality of a defensive act which shuts off his receptive apparatus. . . . He is not a receiver, he is a transmitter." He sits in a bubble, reasoning circularly. Can conspiracism—which ignores the endless possibilities of experience to posit one bleak explanation for everything—present itself to the scholarly mind as much more than a dry, unassimilable husk?

Maybe, but maybe not. Maybe, far from being a creative response to a certain set of possibilities, conspiracism is in fact a profoundly uncreative one, a phenomenon about which there may be little interesting to be said. At least that's one excuse for this book's limitations.

Vita Activa

To Begin Where I Am:
Selected Essays by Czeslaw Milosz
Edited by Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine.
Farrar Straus & Giroux, $25.

Reviewed by MINNA PROCTOR

Czeslaw Milosz is a stern companion, "difficult, in the best sense" according to the 1980 Nobel Prize committee, a writer who demands the utmost attention and unflagging intellectual nimbleness; anything less will not suffice. His delivery is without compromise and his gaze, omnivorously observant and compulsively introspective, settles brazenly on the reader. "I am not afraid to say," he explains at one point, "that a devout and God-fearing man is superior as a human specimen to a restless mocker who is glad to style himself an 'intellectual,' proud of his cleverness in using ideas which he claims as his own though he acquired them in a pawnshop in exchange for simplicity of heart."

Wary of moralizing in general, public intellectuals in this day and age are as unlikely to cite Faustian pacts like the one above as they are to entertain schematic discussions of superiority. Having earned, by dint of longevity and endeavor, the right to approach difficult subjects, Milosz is too independent of spirit, or perhaps too oblivious, to engage in moral relativism. Despite acting the public intellectual, he eschews public oratory in favor of communion, always writing in some form of the first person, building judgments out of personal experience, yearning for "some flicker of understanding" from his reader, the promise "that we are joined by the same belief, or at least by the same hope."

Milosz is perhaps America's most venerated poet (though he maintains the sense of himself

~ Minna Proctor's translation of Federigo Tozzi's *Love in Vain: Selected Stories* was recently published by New Directions.

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as an outsider here) and also among her most intrepid and prolific essayists, as is demonstrated by this fat new collection, *To Begin Where I Am*. After its beauty, the most striking quality of Milosz's prose is its solemnity, which could be off-putting were it not earned. His subjects are somber and his approach inventive: poetry after the Holocaust, humanity under totalitarianism, individualism under capitalism, and mankind's frustrated attempts to order the world through historical narrative. "During the last war, we became convinced," he reminds us, "that people are punished for lack of reason." Do we propagate that absurdity by accepting it as part of the historical narrative, by making it into a lesson for the future? Or do we follow Milosz's lead and investigate with tireless enthusiasm our present moment and the individual's place in it?

A child of the twentieth century (born in Poland in 1911, he witnessed its every permutation), Milosz characterizes his ongoing mission as the exploration of "inanities," "things which can be grasped only in an improvised fashion, resisting precision." These inanities include: the construction of meaning, the existence of God, and man's purpose in a world gone mad. History, a recurring object of Milosz's scrutiny, is mankind's single greatest defense against mortality; modern poetry, with its architecture of ambivalence, or "alternatives," is the last bastion of hope. Milosz rails against the -isms of contemporary jargon, and the descent of political rhetoric into dangerous nonsense. Literary rhetoric may have demonstrated that language is a power structure, but the concentration camp is a more critical power structure. Poetry is man spinning his intellectual wheels trying to mark and define space and time; it is also, as Milosz asserts without fear of self-contradiction, the *vita activa*.

In the seven works newly translated for this volume—the book's most important selections, its raison d'être—Milosz elaborates on these themes, providing new variations but scant new material. (After a prodigious sixty years of intensely honest work, it would be surprising if pieces on unexplored subjects were to be discovered in the writer's manuscript pile.) Three of the essays, "Notes About Brodsky," "Reflections on T. S. Eliot," and "Against Incomprehensible Poetry," are valuable additions to

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Milosz's original and lucid writings on poetry (perhaps the one "inanity" that doesn't resist precision). "Against Incomprehensible Poetry" was originally intended as the introduction to an international poetry anthology, *A Book of Luminous Things*. This genial whirlwind of an essay positions and repositions poetry in relation to an intellectual life in flux. Noting that we are doomed to explain our existence to ourselves in crude dualisms—good and evil, freedom and necessity, life and death—Milosz explains that he has selected poems that exalt duality: poems that affirm life, reveal reality (another way of affirming life), and counteract the erosion of the religious imagination. He is seeking from poetry the "proof that dread and reverence can exist within us simultaneously."

The coexistence of dread and reverence is central to religious sentiment, though it might not be instantly recognizable as such since there are in fact few public intellectuals who take on the subject of religion, or faith. Faith is, from many reasonable points of view, another absurdity, albeit a romantic one with artistic legitimacy. Which is why Milosz's essay about his own religious faith, "If Only This Could Be Said," is the jewel among these new translations. Applying the same critical exigency to this rare and private subject that he applies to his other themes, Milosz admits that his belief in the incarnation is another challenge to death, like history, and thus is another system among many "absurd systems" he identifies in these pieces. Still, it's the system he adheres to, and in this essay he demonstrates how he inhabits his Christianity, which he must simultaneously justify to a world that doesn't quite take faith seriously, and justify to himself because that in itself is the burden of piety.

"Notebook," the last piece in the volume, is nothing more than its title suggests: jottings and aphoristic musings on subjects that in some cases are more thoroughly developed elsewhere, and in other cases are variations on Milosz's preferred themes. Buried in the notes is the following proposal: "Considering the excessive amount of printed paper, perhaps it is time now to introduce a rule limiting articles, essays and the like to a single sentence." In that spirit, it must be said that with the exception of several reprinted articles that are hard to find elsewhere ("Speaking of a Mammal," "Happiness," "Notes on Exile") and the new translations, the bulk of this collection is excessive printed paper, excerpts bastardized from works that are widely available and make better sense in their original settings. Billed by the editors, Milosz translators and scholars Bogdana Carpenter and Madeline G. Levine, as a "sampling," *To Begin Where I Am* proves that Milosz does not sample well—and in some instances "difficult in the best sense" comes to mean obtuse, frustrating the otherwise generous intent of this project. Milosz is too important to be read in bits and pieces. Take advantage of the new and uncollected essays in *To Begin Where I Am*, and read in their book-length entirety the prose poem *Roadside Dog*, the autobiographical *Native Realm*, and the remarkable collection of short biographies in *Emperor of the Earth*. This won't save paper, but it will make more sense.

We call to the attention of our readers the following titles, published in 2001, portions of which first appeared in our pages: *A Company of Readers*, by Jacques Barzun (The Free Press); *Ohio States: A Twentieth-Century Midwestern*, by Jeffrey Hammond (Kent State University Press); *The Language of Cells*, by Spencer Nadler (Random House); *Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood*, by Oliver Sacks (Knopf); *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, introduction by Stacy Schiff (Modern Library); and *The Man Who Found the Missing Link*, by Pat Shipman (Simon & Schuster).

Three recent anthologies include work that was first published in THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. *The Best American Essays 2001*, edited by Robert Atwan and Kathleen Norris (Houghton Mifflin), has essays by Francine du Plessix Gray, Adam Hochschild, David Michaelis, Carlo Rotella, and Anne Fadiman. Material from the SCHOLAR is also reprinted in *The Best American Magazine Writing 2001*, edited by Harold M. Evans (American Society of Magazine Editors), and in *The Pushcart Prize XXVI: Best of the Small Presses, 2002 Edition*, edited by Bill Henderson (W. W. Norton).

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THE READER REPLIES

70TH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

John T. Bethell's 70th Anniversary Chrestomathy in the Autumn issue matched elegance of design with startling prescience of selection. The prize, for me, was to hear again the emphatic, careful voice of the late Jacob Bronowski (whose television series "The Ascent of Man" was such a mind-enlarging experience) addressing "the generation gap" in 1969 with as much perspective as if it were thirty years later.

"Mendeleev's Garden," the extract from Oliver Sacks's memoir, performed two services in addition to crystallizing the man's passionate curiosity: refreshing one's highly imperfect memory of the curious layout of the periodic table (I am not sure I have seen it since tenth-grade chemistry); and bringing footnotes to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR. I never understood the prejudice against them, but any reader with a fear of footnotes is not tough enough for the brave new world we have been thrust into.

WARREN KEITH WRIGHT
Arbyrd, Missouri

MENDELEEV'S GARDEN

Like Oliver Sacks, I love footnotes[1] and the associated worlds they clue and connect. So I must ask the Big Question raised by Dr. Sacks's tenth and last footnote, about the twelve-year-old boy who asked on a children's radio quiz show in November 1945, "Mr. Seaborg, have you made any more elements lately?" Was Dr. Sacks that boy?

J. ALAN NELSON
Waco, Texas

Oliver Sacks replies: No. I was in England, the quiz show in America. But I wish I *had* been in the audience, for Glenn Seaborg was then a great hero of mine.

I've been searching for a manufacturer of germanium diodes—once a common item, now replaced with silicon diodes. I thought for a moment that I'd found the source of my problem: my memory had failed me again, I should have been seeking *calcium* diodes. Consulting another source, I was relieved to see that I'd not yet lost my mind. Element 32 is germanium (Ge), with atomic weight 72.59, not calcium, which appears twice in the illustration of the periodic table on page 25 of the Autumn issue.

RICH KENEFIC
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Editor's note: Because THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR publishes essays rather than academic articles, we remain chary of footnotes. But Oliver Sacks's footnotes, here and in all his writing, are an integral part of his text rather than a record of bibliographic sources, so we granted him an exemption. Alas, no such justification can be found for the typographic alchemy that transmuted germanium into calcium (and turned vanadium into "vandium" as well).

HAPPY TRAILS TO ALL

I found James McConkey's "Happy Trails to All" very happy reading, especially when I came to the reflection, on page 58, about the ironic juxtaposition of Islamic, Christian, and

[1] Ten footnotes in "Mendeleev's Garden," but sixteen pages of text. Oliver Sacks thus averaged only 0.625 footnotes per page. That happens to be the ionic radius (0.625 Å) of platinum and iridium, both of which happen also to have cubic face-centered crystalline structures.

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pagan imagery in the same Istanbul building. Before I read as far as McConkey's allusion to Herbert Muller's *Uses of the Past,* I paused to remember the mischievous delight with which Professor Muller told our class (called The Idea of Freedom) at Indiana University, in 1964 or 1965, how he observed these ironies while he, like McConkey's son Jim, was standing on a tall ladder examining the "echoing dome of that austere but once-sacred edifice." And so Jim's ladder and Herbert Muller's ladder and the tree-house ladder climb into my mental house as well. Perhaps we will all find Jacob wrestling with an angel if we look hard enough?

Thanks for the reminder that we're all connected.

DAVID ISAACSON
Kalamazoo, Michigan

WHY SMART PEOPLE BELIEVE IN GOD

Congratulations to THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR and Arthur Krystal on the latter's expertly written and thought-provoking essay.

GLENN WILLEFORD
Chihuahua, Mexico

Arthur Krystal's problem of belief is best answered with a series of questions:

1. Why does no one have a third eye in the back of his or her head?
2. Why does everyone have two ears each in the same place on opposite sides of the head?
3. Why does everyone have only one head?
4. Why does no one have a third leg?
5. Why didn't evolution take an even slightly different course anywhere on Earth at any time in its history?
6. Why is the temperature on Earth always sufficiently temperate to sustain human life? Why has the weather not become unbearably hot or cold throughout the planet since the dawn of humanity?
7. Why does the food chain work with such synchrony?
8. Why is there enough water on Earth to sustain human life?
9. Why is air composed of exactly the right proportion of numerous gases to sustain human life?
10. Why does every machine invented by humans eventually break, while the ecosystem described in questions 1-9 above never breaks? It just keeps on ticking.

In these unanswerable questions, we see that there must have been a Master Plan, and thus a Master Planner.

PAUL KERSON
New York City

GETTING AND SPENDING

I was interested to read Phyllis Rose's agreeable portrait of poetry teaching at Harvard as practiced by Douglas Bush decades ago (although Bush was no "New England aristocrat"; having grown up in Canada, he was not to the Harvard manner born). Professor Rose remembers, nostalgically, the excitements of learning to read poetry closely, as with the Wordsworth sonnet Bush introduced her to. Indeed, she says in her conclusion, she would give up "The Sopranos," e-mail, women's studies, Stephen Greenblatt, and all sorts of other good things from the last thirty years of literary and cultural studies if she could recover "the concentration I was able to deploy in mastering the wisdom of the dead white men." But, she tells us, she can't: "the world's moved on."

I have an idea: why doesn't Professor Rose offer a course in romantic poets (or seventeenth-century or modern ones) and confront once more the pleasure and challenges of trying to talk about poetic expression? Why not stop the world dead in its tracks and see, in the company of students who often don't have a clue as to how to proceed, what it's like to rise to the lines of Wordsworth (or Milton or Yeats)? It's an activity guaranteed, so I keep finding out, to improve your concentration.

WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD
Amherst, Massachusetts

Professor Rose is puzzled by the last line of Wordsworth's sonnet "The World Is Too Much With Us"—"Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn." Triton was not "the god of the sea," but his son, and his job was to pacify the waters after a storm, which he did by blowing his horn. The horn's sound would not be "tinny" or "deep bass," because the horn is a conch shell. It is wreathed because seaweed sticks to it. Ovid, in *Metamorphoses* I, 333-336,

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describes it: *caeruleum Tritona vocat conchaeque sonanti / inspirare iubet fluctusque et flumina signo / iam revocare dato: cava bucina sumitur illi, / tortilis in latum quae turbine crescit ab imo* ("he calls blue Triton and orders him to blow on his resonating conch and now call back the rivers and waves by giving the signal: he takes the hollow, curved horn, which expands in width in a spiral from the bottom"). There follows a narrative of the effect of Triton's horn signal on seas and lands.

By this image the English poet evokes the charm of Ovid's Latin and the gentle correspondence between human beings and gods and nature that it portrays. Wordsworth's readers would have recognized the allusion. A twenty-first-century professor, attempting to interpret his poetry, should have known it too.

TIMOTHY COLEMAN
Cleveland, Ohio

I was startled to see that Phyllis Rose had a period at the end of the first line of Wordsworth's sonnet, and accordingly parsed "late and soon" as modifying the preceding clause. I had always read it as modifying "lay waste," in parallel with "getting and spending." I was willing to learn, but I find that the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations* and the *Oxford Book of English Poetry*, at least, agree with me in ending the first line with a comma, which, in view of the semicolon after "us," pretty much dictates my reading. Is it known how Wordsworth punctuated the poem?

JOSEPH C. FINEMAN
Malden, Massachusetts

Phyllis Rose replies: Mr. Fineman is absolutely and humblingly right about the comma after "late and soon." I apologize for the error. I wrote from memory, and when I proofread, I apparently didn't believe my eyes. Memory and belief: other alchemies.

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The Podium

With Whom Would You Travel?

DANIELLE S. ALLEN

Imagine you are about to leave on a journey through deserts and over mountains and across grassy plains; there will be droughts and earthquakes and plagues. You may choose to go with one of two parties. One party is known to be straightforward about its intentions and to let individuals speak about what the group should do. The other party is known to rely on deceit to carry out its plans. With whom would you travel?

The party that commits itself to frank openness will always gain more members and more trust. The deceitful party will eventually find itself alone. We need to remember this whenever we begin to fear, as many of us recently have, that our own democratic characteristics—our lack of suspicion, our magnanimity, our civil liberties, our commitment to educating anybody and everybody—have made us vulnerable. A democracy is not weak for opening itself to the world, nor for allowing its citizens great liberties. To the contrary: these are the things that make us strong, for they inspire the loyal consent on which democratic power rests.

In the coming days and years, as we consider which policies to take with us on our difficult journey, we should remember the first sentence of the Declaration of Independence: "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, *a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*" Those revolutionaries resolved to prove their arguments by, in their words, letting "Facts be submitted to a candid world." Their frankness was itself radical. To turn to deceit, guardedness, or the restriction of freedoms would be to undo democracy's greatest invention and its greatest source of strength.

—from the Aims of Education Address, University of Chicago, September 20, 2001

Danielle S. Allen is Associate Professor of Classics and Politics at the University of Chicago. A MacArthur Fellow, she is the author of *The World of Prometheus: The Politics of Punishing in Democratic Athens.*

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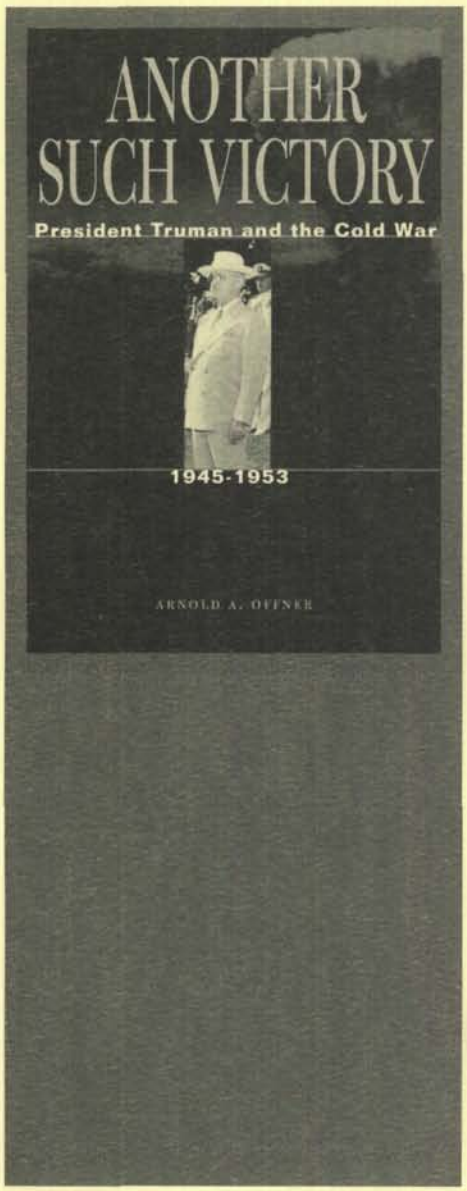

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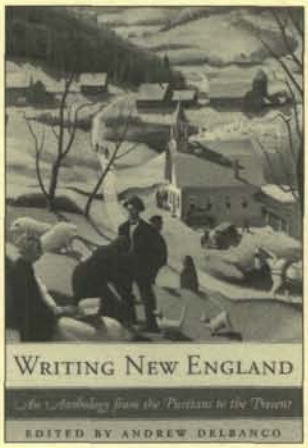

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